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Ms. TREE QUARTERLY

A COMPLETE Ms. Tree Thriller
by MAX ALLAN COLLINS
and TERRY BEATTY

PLUS:

MIDNIGHTTM


by Edward Gorman
and Graham Nolan

THE BUTCHERTM

by Mark Baron and
Shea Anton Pensa



THE DEVILS PUNCHBOWL



BLESSED BE,
MY SISTERS AND
BROTHERS... JOIN
WITH ME IN RECITING THE
SDRAWKAS REYARP
SDROL ...

Ms. TREE

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G-5238

NEMA LIVEE MORF SU REVILLED TUB... NOISHAYTPMET OOTNI TON SUH DEEL.
SUH TSHAIGA SAPJERT TATH YETH, VIGRAWF WZA SESAPJERT
RUA SUH VIGRAWF!



DERB ILAID RUA YEDSITH SUH
VIG NEVAH NISI ZA THRE NI...

NUB EEB LIW EIB EYTH, MAIN EYTH
EB DWOHLAH...



NEVEH NITRA CHIOO...

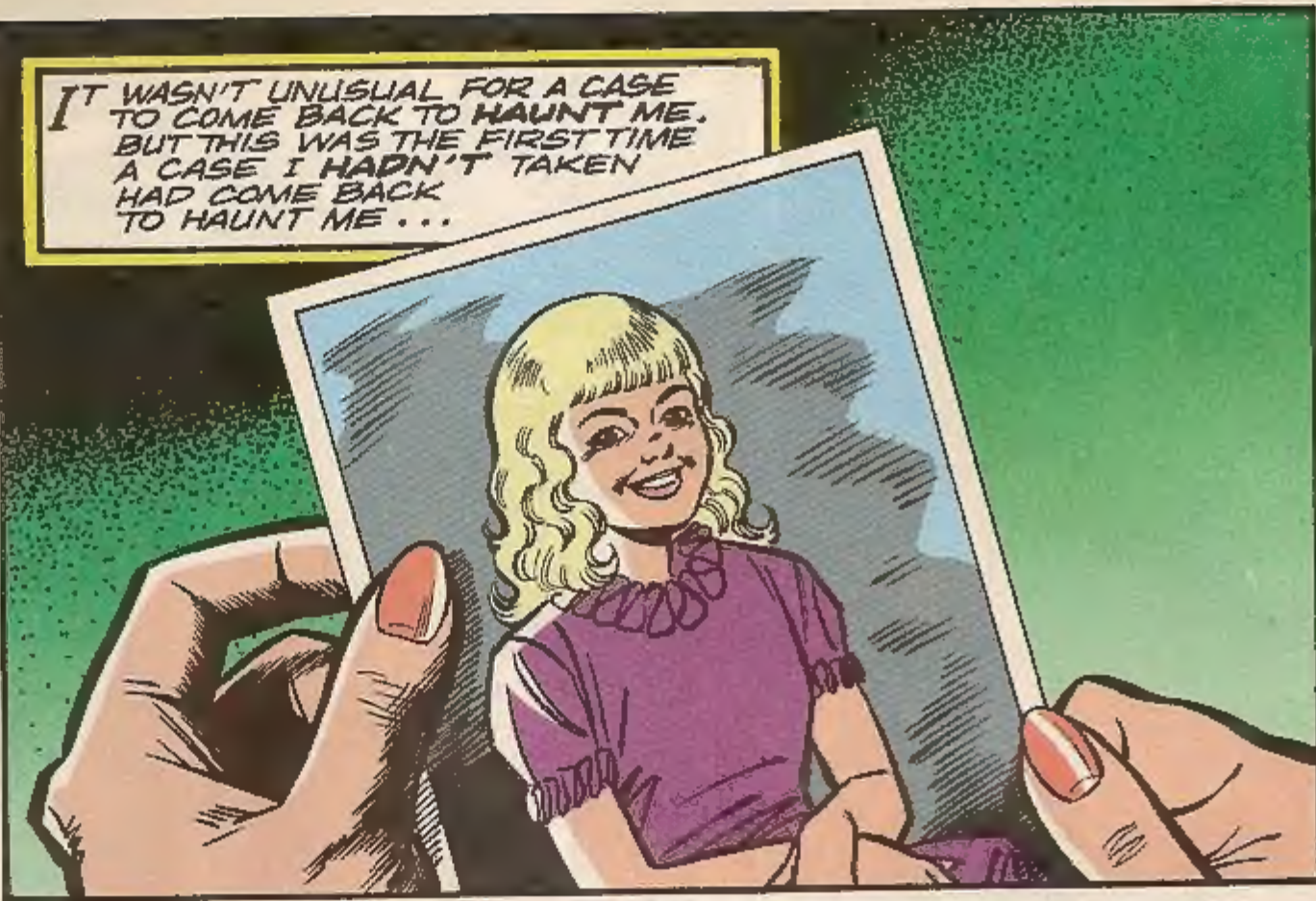
...REHTAF RUO!





THREE
MONTHS
LATER

IT WASN'T UNUSUAL FOR A CASE
TO COME BACK TO HAUNT ME.
BUT THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME
A CASE I HADN'T TAKEN
HAD COME BACK
TO HAUNT ME...



MY NAME IS MICHAEL TREE.
OF TREE
INVESTIGATIONS, INC.

AH, YES. I
REMEMBER.



WE CAME TO YOU
TWO YEARS AGO,
ABOUT KAREN.

THAT
PICTURE WAS
OLD, EVEN THEN--
SHE WAS
TWELVE.



SHE'D BEEN MISSING
FOUR YEARS, AND I
TURNED YOU AWAY.
I WAS **WRONG**
TO DO THAT.

SINCE THEN, MY OWN
SON... STEPSON... WAS
A **RUNAWAY**. BUT I WAS,
THANK GOD, ABLE TO
FIND HIM. SO YOU
MIGHT SAY... MY
PERSPECTIVE'S
CHANGED.



"YOU MEAN -- YOU'D TAKE
OUR CASE, TODAY,"
MR. MILLER SAID.
"YOU'D LOOK FOR KAREN?"

"YOU TOLD US THE TRAIL WAS TOO COLD,"
MRS. MILLER SAID. "THAT SIX
INVESTIGATORS AND ASSORTED
POLICE OFFICIALS HAD FAILED
TO FIND HER..."

... AND THAT IT WOULD
BE **BAD** BUSINESS TO
WASTE TIME LOOKING
FOR HER.



MRS. MILLER ... I UNDERSTAND YOUR
BITTERNESS. BUT, YES, I AM
WILLING TO LOOK FOR KAREN.

OF COURSE, NOW THAT SHE'S
EIGHTEEN, EVEN IF I **DO**
FIND HER, YOU WON'T HAVE
ANY LEGAL RECOURSE TO
MAKE HER COME HOME.



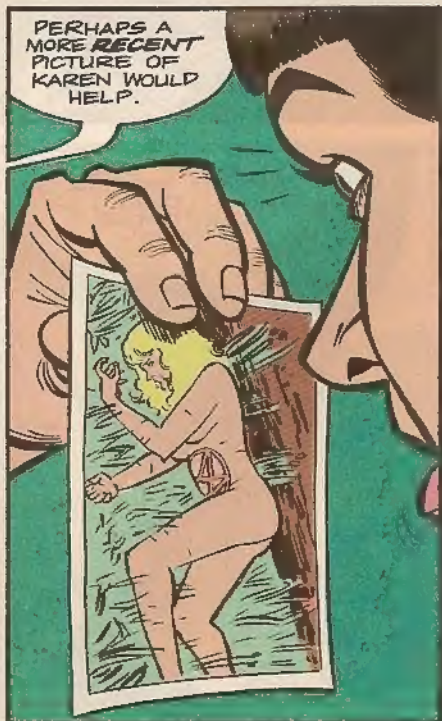
YOU **MISUNDERSTAND**
US, MS. TREE. WE
KNOW ABOUT YOU.
WE KNOW **EXACTLY**
HOW YOU HANDLED
YOUR STEPSON'S
DISAPPEARANCE.



"WE KNOW, FOR EXAMPLE,
THAT YOU DEALT... **FIRMLY**
... WITH THE MAN WHO
ABDUCTED YOUR STEPSON..."



PERHAPS A
MORE **RECENT**
PICTURE OF
KAREN WOULD
HELP.



THAT PICTURE IS ABOUT THREE MONTHS OLD. KAREN WAS FOUND IN THE BRUSH ALONG A TRAIL IN A STATE PARK CALLED WILD CAT DEN. **STRANGLER.**

THIS PICTURE BETTER SHOWS THE AREA ON HER STOMACH WHERE A **SYMBOL** WAS SCRAWLED, IN LIPSTICK. I BELIEVE IT'S CALLED AN **INVERTED PENTAGRAM**.

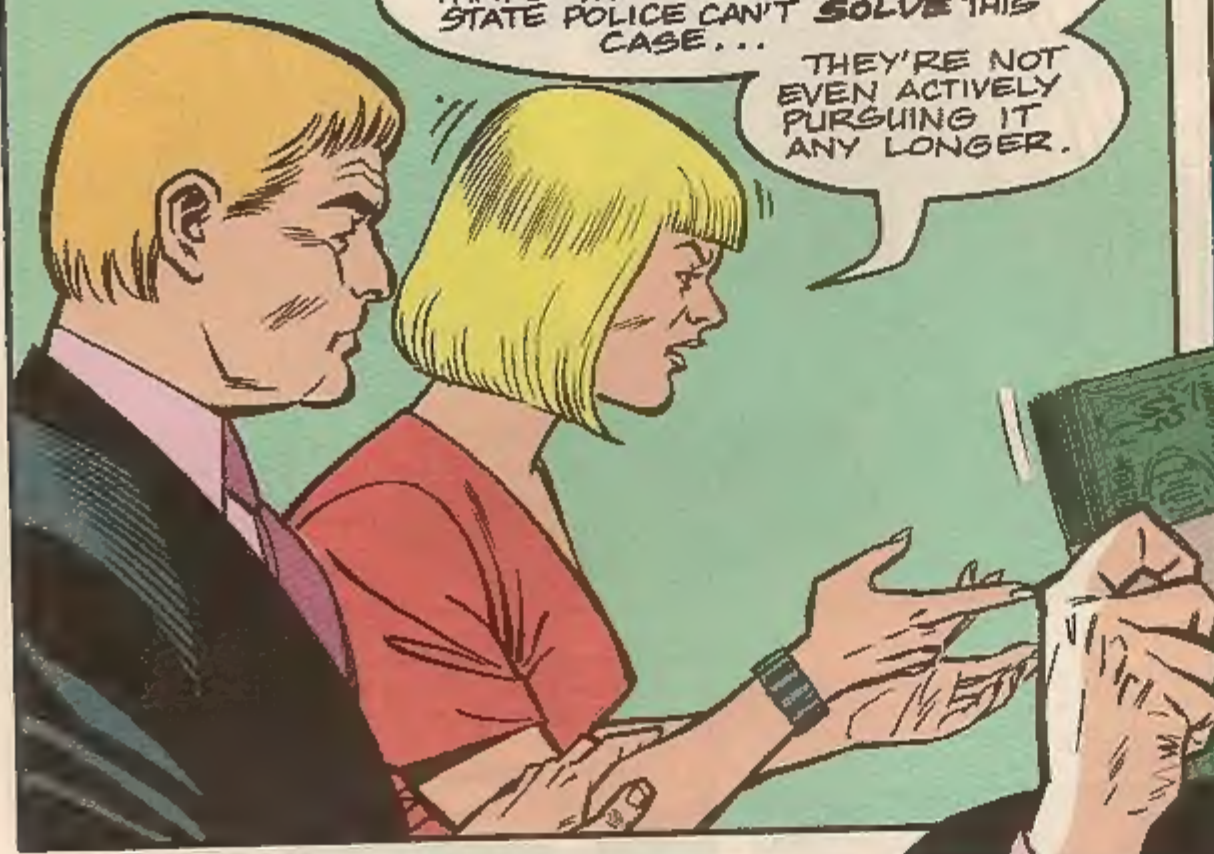
MR. AND MRS. MILLER... I'M SORRY. I'M SO SORRY. I **KNOW** HOW YOU MUST FEEL ABOUT ME. IF THERE'S ANYTHING I CAN DO... ANYTHING AT ALL...



WELL, OF COURSE THERE IS. THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE. THE STATE POLICE CAN'T **SOLVE** THIS CASE...

THEY'RE NOT EVEN ACTIVELY PURSUING IT ANY LONGER.

WE WANT YOU TO FIND THE PERSON WHO DID IT. WE WANT YOU TO **FIND** HIM AND **KILL** HIM. AND WE HAVE FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS **CASH** FROM OUR SAVINGS FOR YOU TO DO IT.

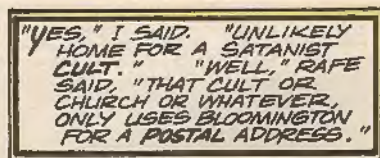
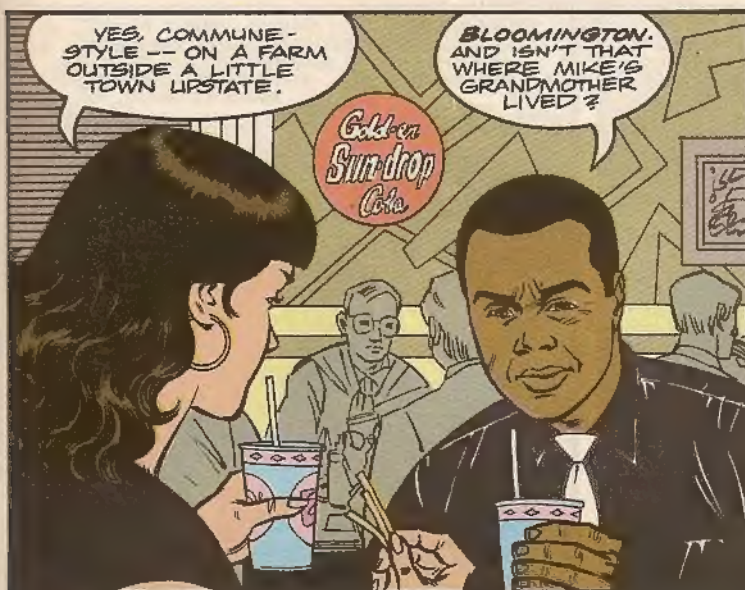
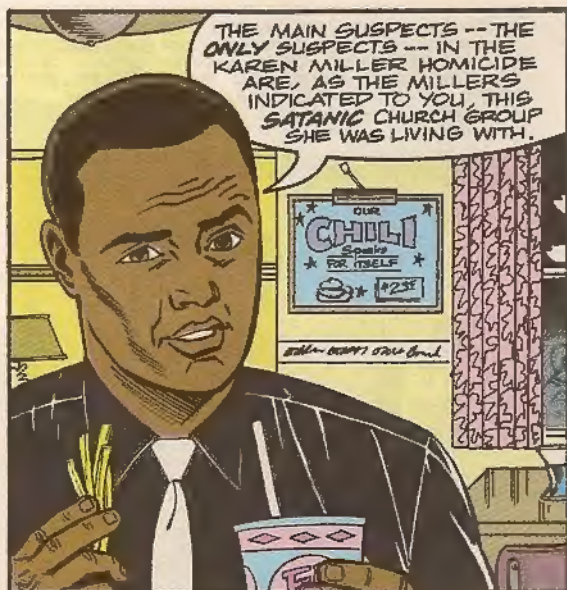
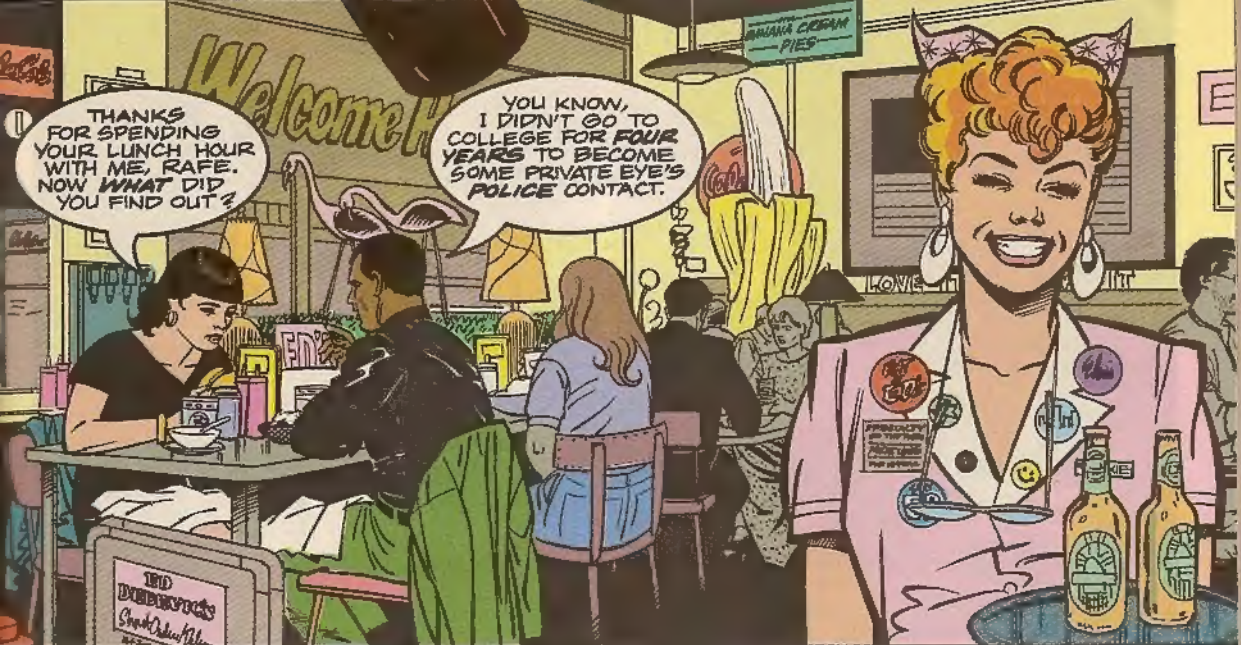


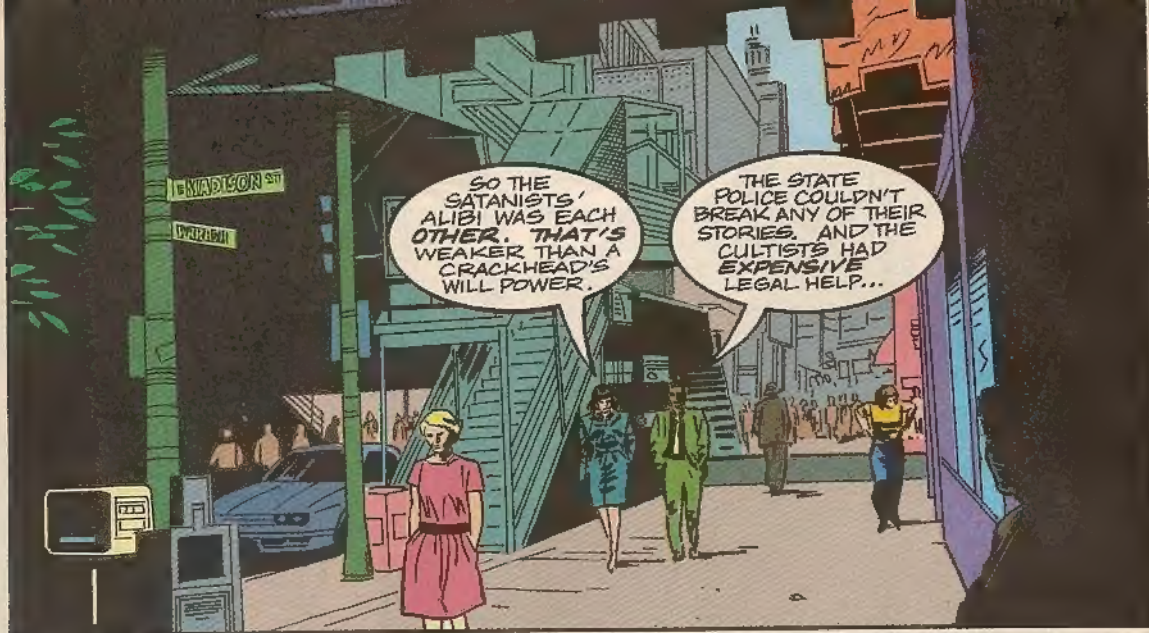
I'M AFRAID I CAN'T DO THAT, MR. MILLER, MRS. MILLER. I CAN'T ACCEPT YOUR MONEY.

BUT...

THERE WILL BE NO CHARGE.







"WHERE DO THEY GET THEIR DOUGH?" I ASKED. "THE CHURCH OF SATANIC ILLUMINATION," RAFE SAID. "IS A PROSPEROUS COTTAGE INDUSTRY... THEIR LEADER, SAM HAIN, HAS BEEN ON OPRAH, SALLY JESSY, GERALDO, DONAHUE... YOU NAME IT."



RAFE, I ADMIT I'M NOT EXACTLY UP ON THIS SATANIST STUFF. I NEED TO GET SOME EDUCATION, QUICK. ANY DETECTIVE ON THE FORCE WORKING OCCULT CRIMES EXCLUSIVELY, THESE DAYS?



"WE HAVE SEVERAL WHO -- IF YOU'LL PARDON THE EXPRESSION -- DABBLE IN IT. BUT THE BEST MAN AROUND IN THAT FIELD IS WITH THE STATE POLICE ... IN FACT, HE WORKED ON THE MILLER CASE."



TERRIFIC! CAN YOU PUT ME IN TOUCH?

SURE. BUT I DON'T THINK YOUR GLEE IS GOING TO HOLD LONG AFTER YOU FIND OUT WHO IT IS...



I DROVE OUT TO ELMHURST, THE SUBURB WHERE THE INVESTIGATIVE DIVISION OF THE STATE POLICE WAS HEADQUARTERED. CAPTAIN SAM MEYERS AND I HAD A HISTORY. NOT A PLEASANT ONE.

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, MS. TREE. BUT NOT LONG ENOUGH...

YOU DON'T LIKE ME AND I DON'T LIKE YOU. WE HAVE THAT MUCH IN COMMON... GIVES US A MUTUAL BASIS FOR A RELATIONSHIP.

I'M A **BUSY** MAN. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

I UNDERSTAND YOU WORKED ON THE **KAREN MILLER CASE**. WELL, HER PARENTS HAVE HIRED ME TO LOOK INTO IT.

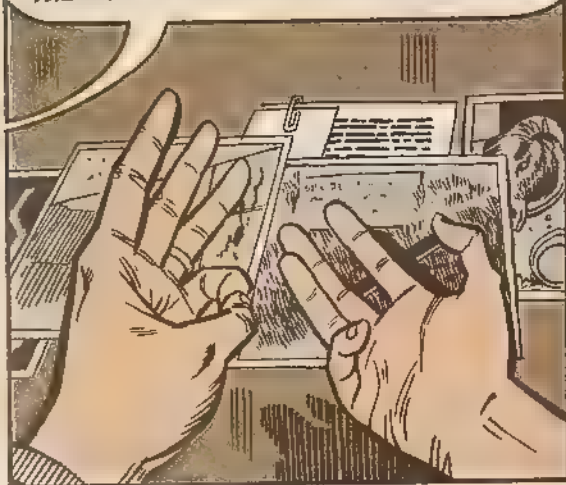
REALLY? SIT DOWN, MS. TREE... SIT DOWN...

I DIDN'T KNOW WHY THE CHILLY RECEPTION HAD SUDDENLY THAWED, BUT I WASN'T ABOUT TO LOOK THIS GIFT HORSE'S ASS IN THE MOUTH, SO TO SPEAK.

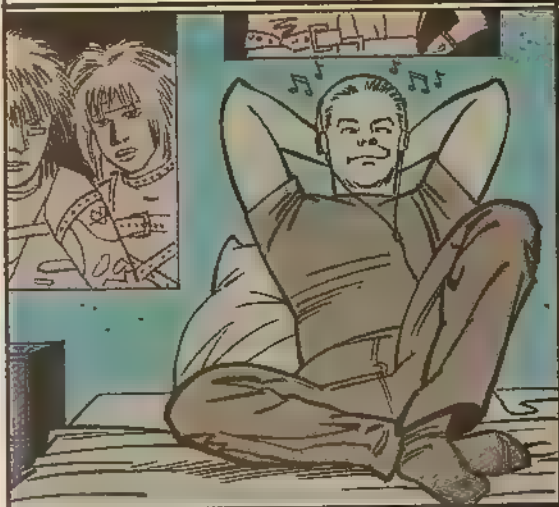
RAFE VALER SAYS YOU'VE BEEN WORKING **SATANIC** CRIME CASES --

AND YOU NEED A **CRASH COURSE** IN THE SUBJECT, HUH? WELL, I'M YOUR MAN.

THERE ARE **THREE** BASIC CATEGORIES FOR THESE SATANISTS. THE FIRST IS THE **SOLITARY SATANIST**... AN OFFSHOOT OF THE YOUTH SUBCULTURE INTO **HEAVY METAL** AND **FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES**.



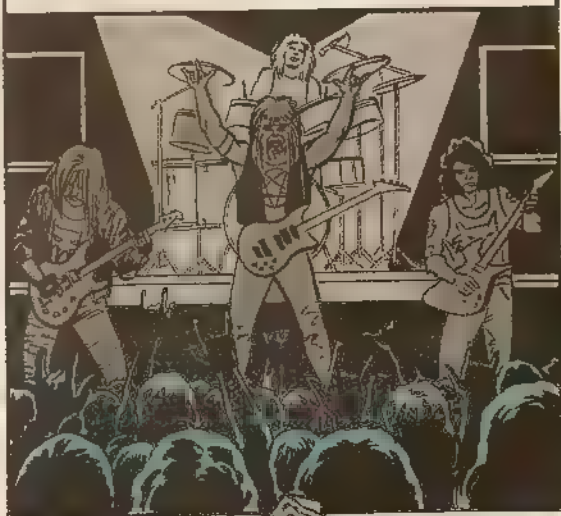
"COME ON, CAPTAIN," I SAID, "MY STEPSON LISTENS TO **HEADBANGING MUSIC**, BUT HE'S NO **CLOSET SATANIST**!"



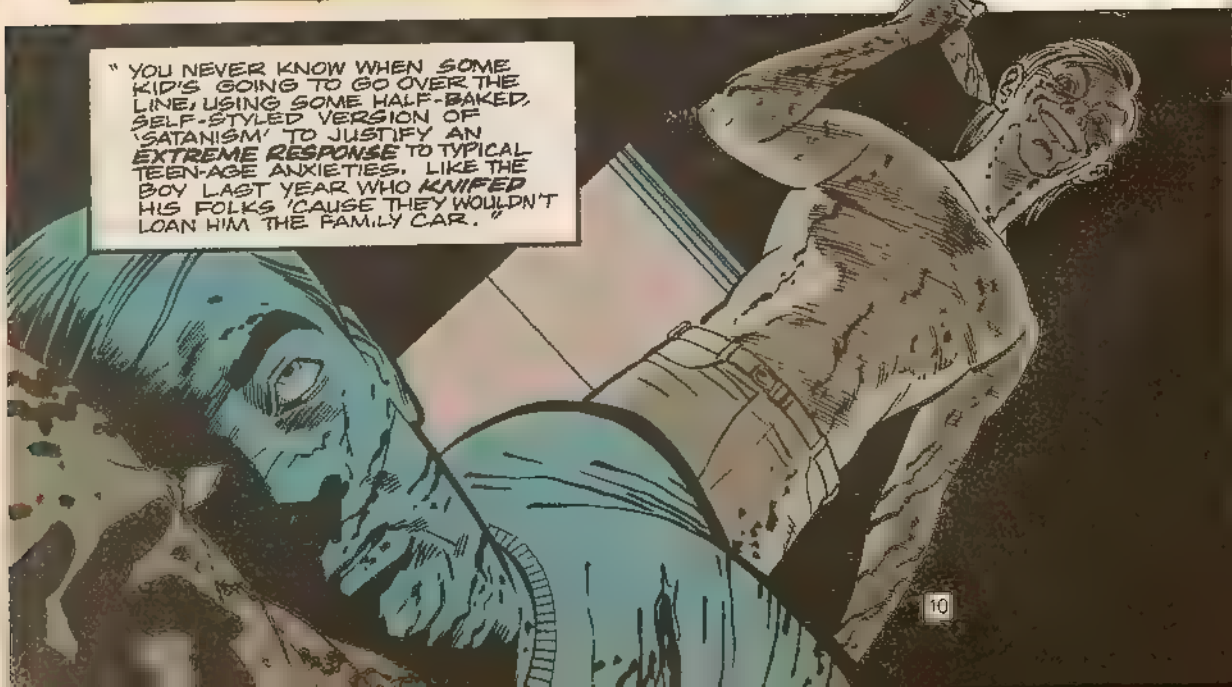
HOW DO YOU KNOW? SURE, PLENTY OF KIDS, AND **ADULTS, TOO**, PLAY THESE GAMES AND **NEVER HARM THEMSELVES OR ANYBODY ELSE...**



"... BUT IS ALL THAT DARK IMAGERY **HEALTHY**? SPEAKING AS A COP AND A CHRISTIAN, I FOR ONE ABHOR IT."



"YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN SOME KID'S GOING TO GO OVER THE LINE, USING SOME HALF-BAKED, SELF-STYLED VERSION OF 'SATANISM' TO JUSTIFY AN **EXTREME RESPONSE** TO TYPICAL TEEN-AGE ANXIETIES, LIKE THE BOY LAST YEAR WHO **KNIFED** HIS FOLKS 'CAUSE THEY WOULDN'T LOAN HIM THE FAMILY CAR."



DO YOU CLASSIFY SERIAL KILLERS LIKE THE "NIGHT STALKER" AND "SON OF SAM" IN THIS CATEGORY?



"YES," CAPTAIN MEYERS SAID, "THOUGH SOME EXPERTS CLASSIFY THESE MONSTERS SEPARATELY. NONE OF THE ORGANIZED SATANISTS WANT TO CLAIM 'EM, THOUGH THESE INDIVIDUALS ARE OCCASIONALLY LINKED TO SUCH A GROUP."



AND THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF THESE ORGANIZED SATANIC GROUPS: THE "OUTLAW" CULTS AND THE NEO-SATANIC CHURCHES.



"THE CULTS ARE A LEFT-OVER FROM THE 'HIPPIE' ERA -- MEMBERS IN THEIR TEENS AND TWENTIES, INTO FREE LOVE, DRUGS, SEX, ROCK 'N' ROLL..."



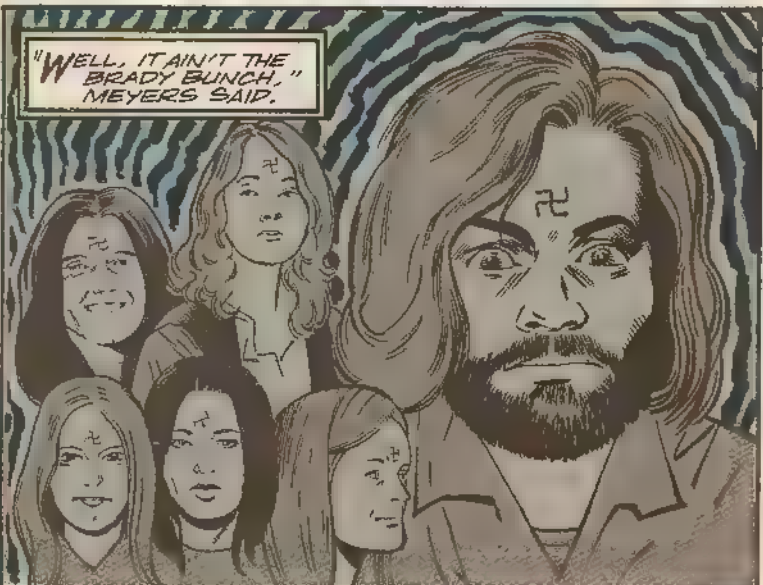
"NOT TO MENTION VANDALISM. THEY WORSHIP SATAN, SACRIFICE ANIMALS, DRINK BLOOD -- FUN STUFF. USUALLY THERE'S A CHARISMATIC LEADER."



WE'RE IN THE MANSON FAMILY AREA.



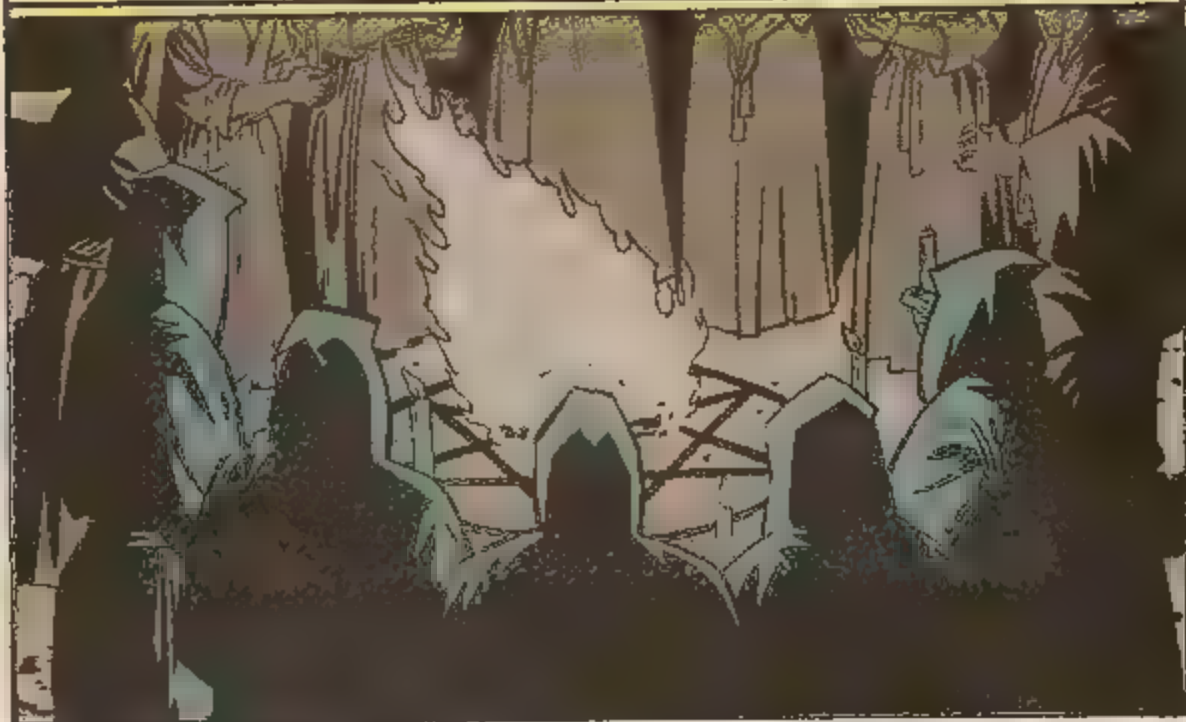
"WELL, IT AIN'T THE BRADY BUNCH," MEYERS SAID.



SO OUR "CHURCH OF SATANIC ILLUMINATION" FALLS INTO THAT CATEGORY.



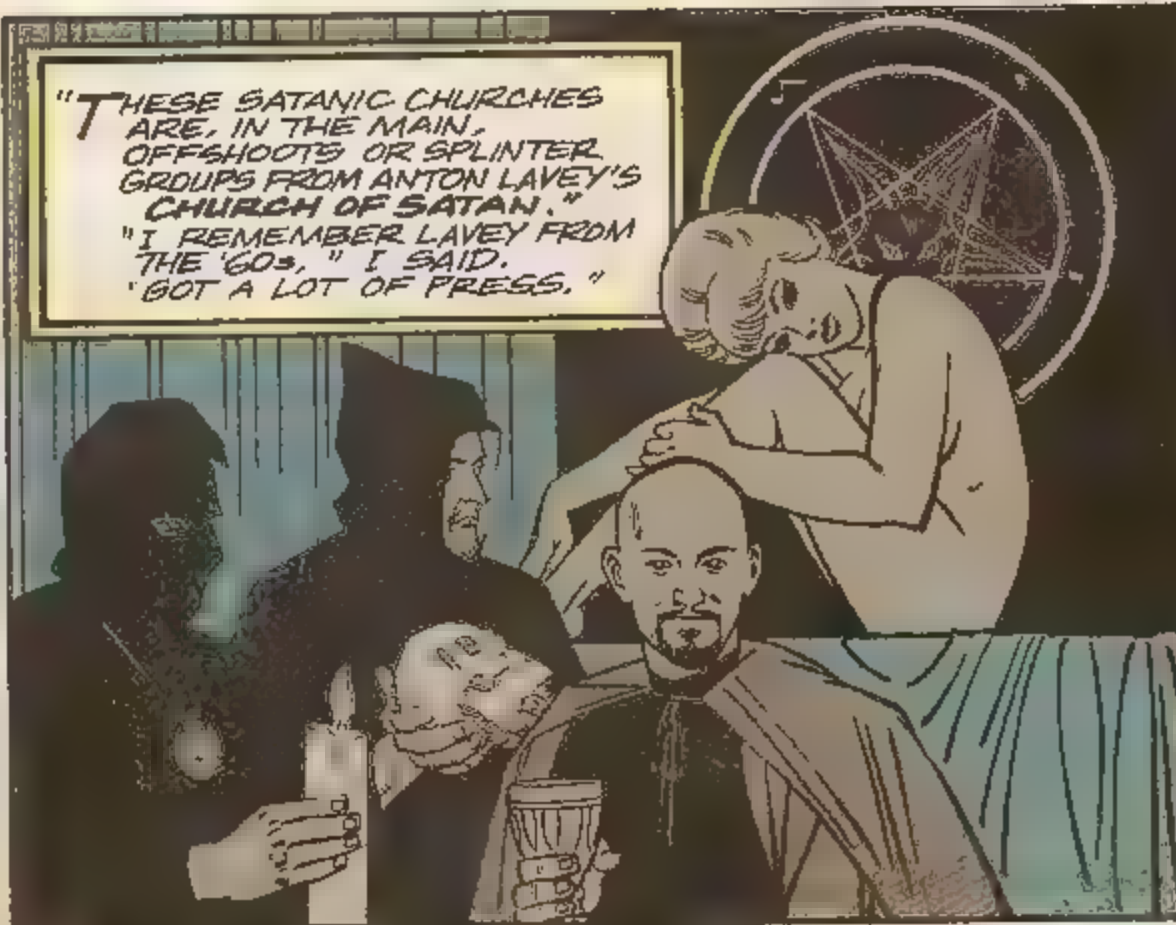
"IT SEEMS TO HAVE STARTED OUT THAT WAY," MEYERS SAID. "BUT IT'S DEVELOPED INTO A FULL-SCALE NEO-SATANIST CHURCH. THE GROUP NUMBERS NEARLY FIFTY, THEY HAVE A WELL-DEFINED THEOLOGY..."



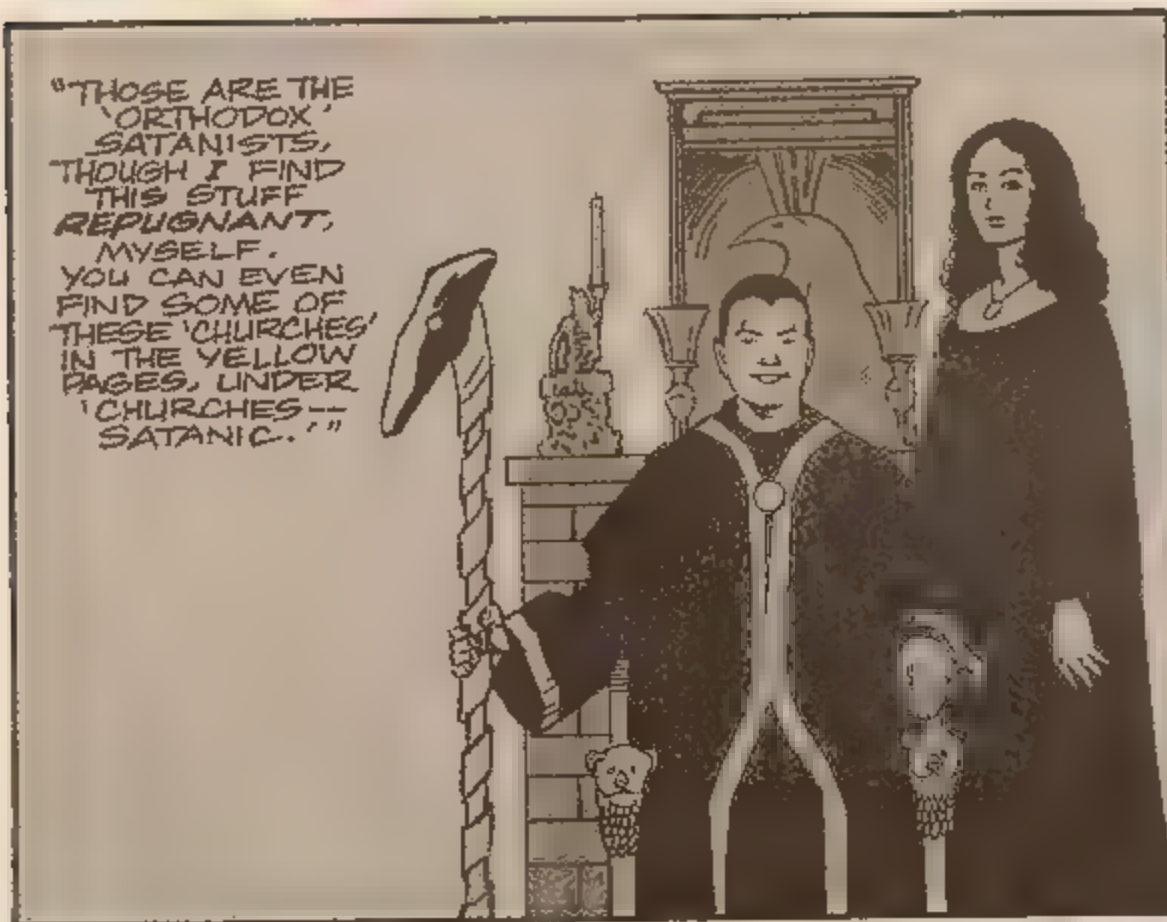
...AND, LIKE MOST SATANIC CHURCHES, THEY **PROFESS** TO NOT HARMING ANY LIVING THING IN THEIR RITUALS, AND DON'T ADVOCATE ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES.



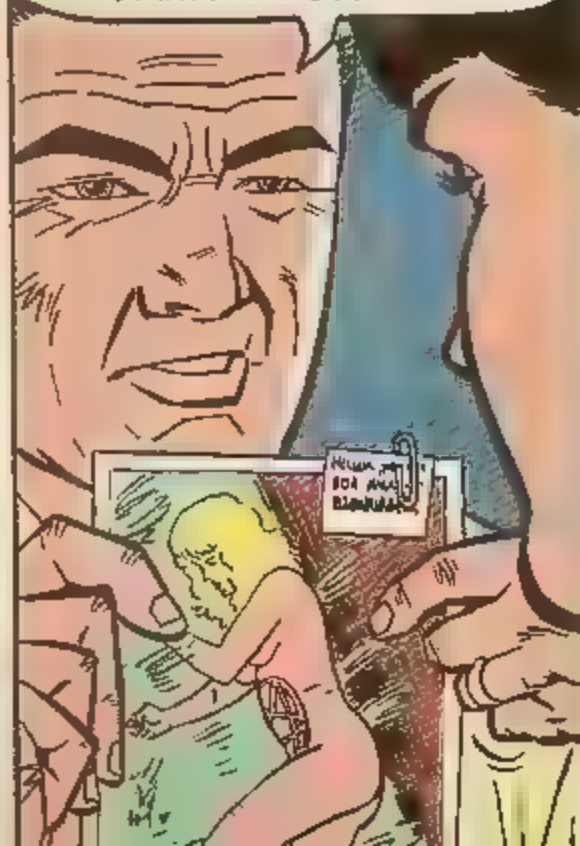
"THESE SATANIC CHURCHES ARE, IN THE MAIN, OFFSHOOTS OR SPLINTER GROUPS FROM ANTON LAVEY'S CHURCH OF SATAN." "I REMEMBER LAVEY FROM THE '60s," I SAID. "GOT A LOT OF PRESS."

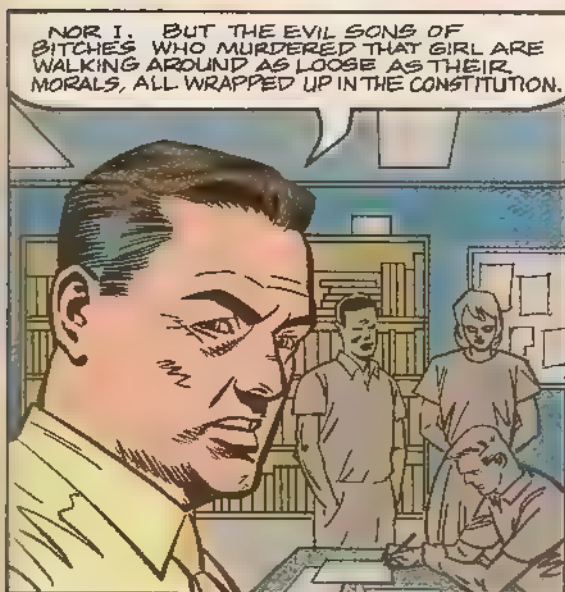
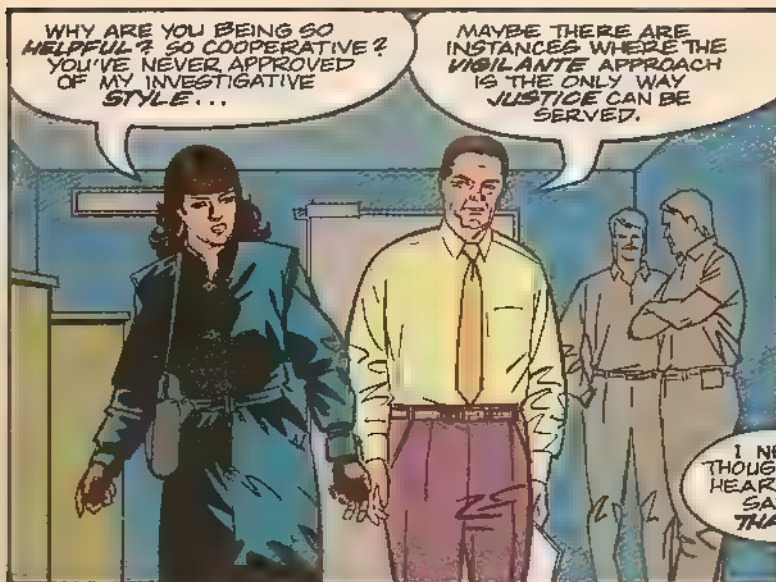


"THOSE ARE THE 'ORTHODOX' SATANISTS, THOUGH I FIND THIS STUFF REPUGNANT, MYSELF. YOU CAN EVEN FIND SOME OF THESE 'CHURCHES' IN THE YELLOW PAGES, UNDER 'CHURCHES -- SATANIC.'"

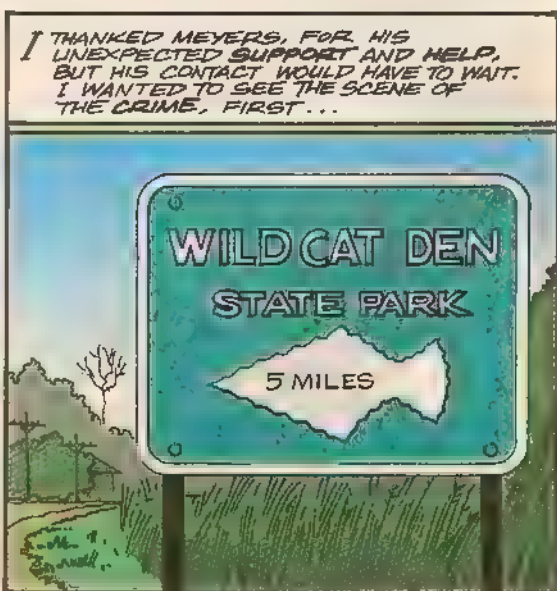
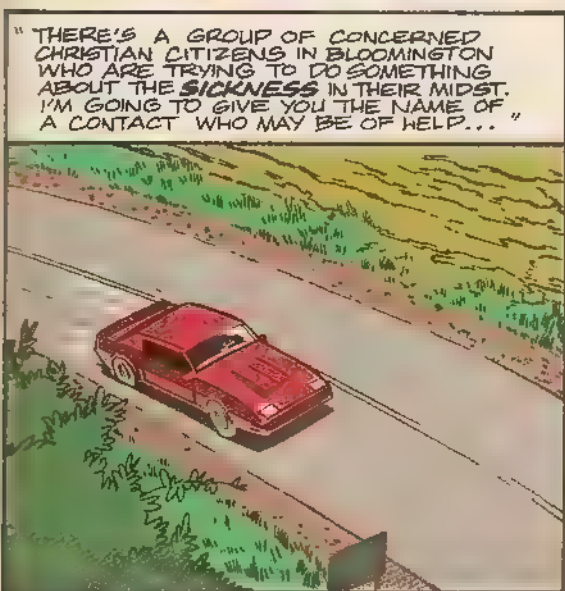
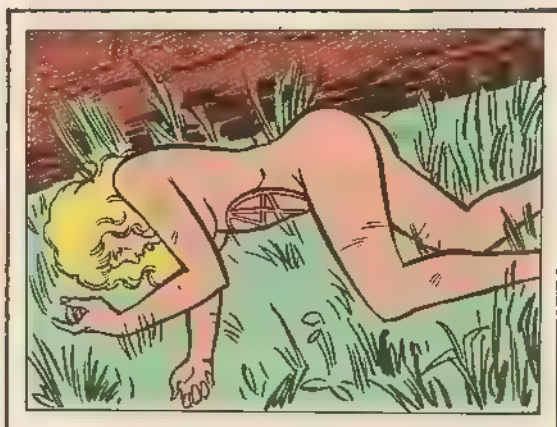


I COULDN'T GET ANYTHING ON SAM HAIN OR HIS "CHURCH" -- BUT I **KNOW** THEY KILLED KAREN MILLER IN SOME DAMN RITUAL.





"I GOT PULLED OFF THE CASE, ACCUSED OF HARASSMENT. NOW THE INVESTIGATION'S AS DEAD AS THE MILLER GIRL. YOU'RE THE ONLY HOPE, MS. TREE, THAT THAT CHILD WILL BE AVENGED. THAT SAM HAIN WILL MEET HIS JUST REWARD... AND MAYBE HIS MAKER."

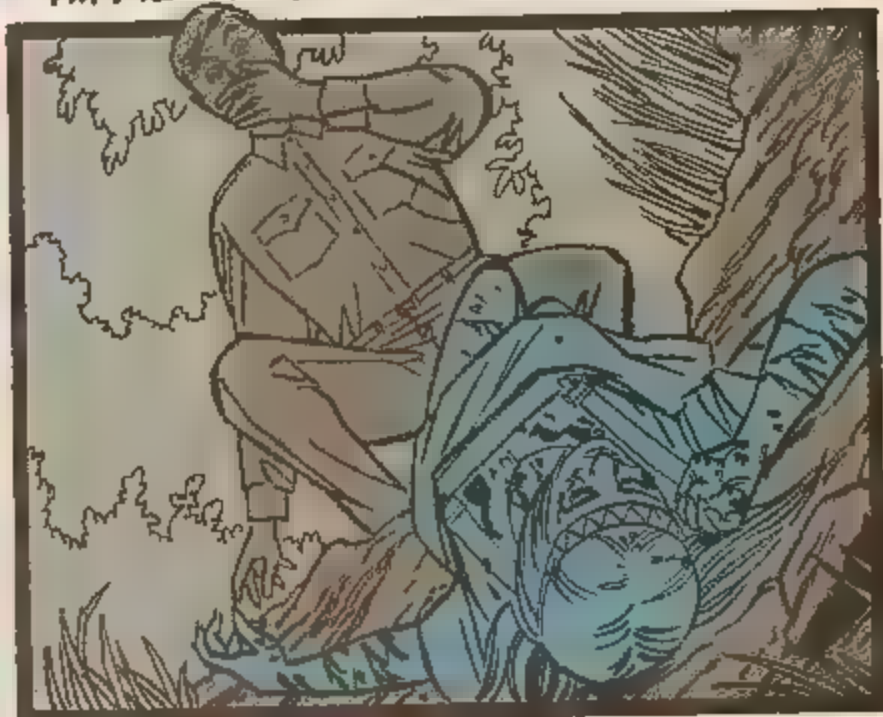


I'D CALLED AHEAD AND MADE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE PARK RANGER. I'D EXPLAINED ON THE PHONE THAT I WAS WORKING FOR THE MILLER FAMILY.

TRAGIC. NOT THE FIRST TIME, THOUGH.

OH, REALLY?

"THIS IS THE THIRD GIRL WHO'S DIED IN THESE HILLS AND ROCKS," THE RANGER SAID. "FIRST WAS BACK IN '63, BEFORE MY TIME-- WELL, I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL, THEN. SECOND WAS, OH - '72, WHEN THIS PLACE HAD LOTS OF HIPPIE TYPES. I FOUND THAT GIRL MYSELF."



NEVER FORGET IT...

WERE THERE ANY SIMILARITIES IN THE MURDERS, OTHER THAN THE VICTIMS WERE YOUNG WOMEN?

NOT REALLY. BODIES TURNED UP AT THREE DIFFERENT SITES. THE OTHER TWO VICTIMS WERE CLOTHED; FIRST WAS STRANGLED, SECOND WAS KNIFED.



KAREN MILLER WAS STRANGLED.

"LIKE I SAID, MS. TREE, THE FIRST GIRL, BACK IN '63, WAS FOUND CLOTHED. AND THAT'S A LOT OF YEARS BETWEEN EPISODES. FOR A SERIAL KILLER. OF COURSE, YOU'RE THE EXPERT."

IF YOU WANT ME TO SHOW YOU WHERE THE BODY WAS FOUND, WE'D BEST GET STARTED. IT'LL BE DARK SOON, AND THIS IS NO PLACE TO BE WHEN THE SUN'S DOWN.

JUST ASK KAREN MILLER...



THE PARK WAS THREE HUNDRED ACRES OF WHITE PINE AND OAK. AS WE HEADED TOWARD THE WINDING NATURE TRAILS UP IN THE HILLS AND ROCKS, WE PASSED AN OLD MILL DATING TO 1848. I ASKED THE RANGER HOW MANY MEN WERE WORKING UNDER HIM.

WHAT OTHER MEN? I'M IT. I'M ALL THE SUPERVISION THERE IS IN THIS PARK.

WELL, NO WONDER IT'S DANGEROUS! HOW LONG HAS THE LOCAL SATANIST CULT BEEN COMING AROUND FOR PICNICS?

COUPLE YEARS. FIRST TIME I SPOTTED 'EM, I THOUGHT THEY WAS KKK!

FOR GOD'S SAKE, WHY HAVEN'T YOU CHASED THEM OUT? TWO YEARS YOU'VE PUT UP WITH THIS?

MS. TREE, A LOT OF WITCHCRAFT GROUPS USE STATE PARKS FOR THEIR CEREMONIES. IT AIN'T ILLEGAL. IF THEY DON'T DESTROY PROPERTY OR BOTHER ANYBODY ELSE, I LEAVE 'EM ALONE.

WHAT THEY DO IS **PROTECTED** BY LAW. AND THAT CHURCH OF SATANIC ILLUMINATION BUNCH, HELL -- THEY DON'T EVEN LITTER.

"THERE'S NO SIGN OF ANIMAL SACRIFICE... ONCE IN A WHILE I FIND SOMETHING CREEPY, LIKE A BURNED-UP DOLL OR SOMETHING."



THEY MAKE THEIR SYMBOLS IN THE DIRT, OR IN CHALK ON ROCK -- AND I APPRECIATE THAT. **REAL** VANDALS USE SPRAY PAINT FOR THEIR GRAFFITI AND SUCH. WISH THEY WAS ALL AS WELL-BEHAVED AS THOSE SATANISTS.

YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS!

BONJOUR

1980

HEY, I AIN'T PAID TO JUDGE. WORST THING I EVER SAW 'EM DO ... AND THIS WAS FROM A **DISTANCE**, SO WHO'S TO SAY... IS GET **NAKED** AND PARTY DOWN. IF I WAS TO CHASE EVERY COUPLE OUTA THIS PARK THAT DID THAT, ATTENDANCE WOULD DROP WAY OFF.

THAT'S WHERE THEY FOUND HER. POOR CHILD. WE'RE NOT FAR FROM THE DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL, YOU KNOW.

WHAT?

"**DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL**. A BIG ROCK FORMATION WHERE THOSE SATANISTS LIKE TO HANG. FUNNY THING... BACK IN THE 1800s, **EVERYTHING** IN THE PARK HAD **DEVIL** NAMES -- STEAMBOAT ROCK USED TO BE CALLED DEVIL'S FLAT IRON; FAT MAN'S SQUEEZE WAS THE **DEVIL'S DOORWAY**..."

"BUT THOSE NAMES KIND OF FADED AWAY," THE RANGER SAID. "EXCEPT FOR THE PUNCHBOWL. FUNNY COINCIDENCE, THIS SATAN STUFF COMIN' UP AGAIN, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS."

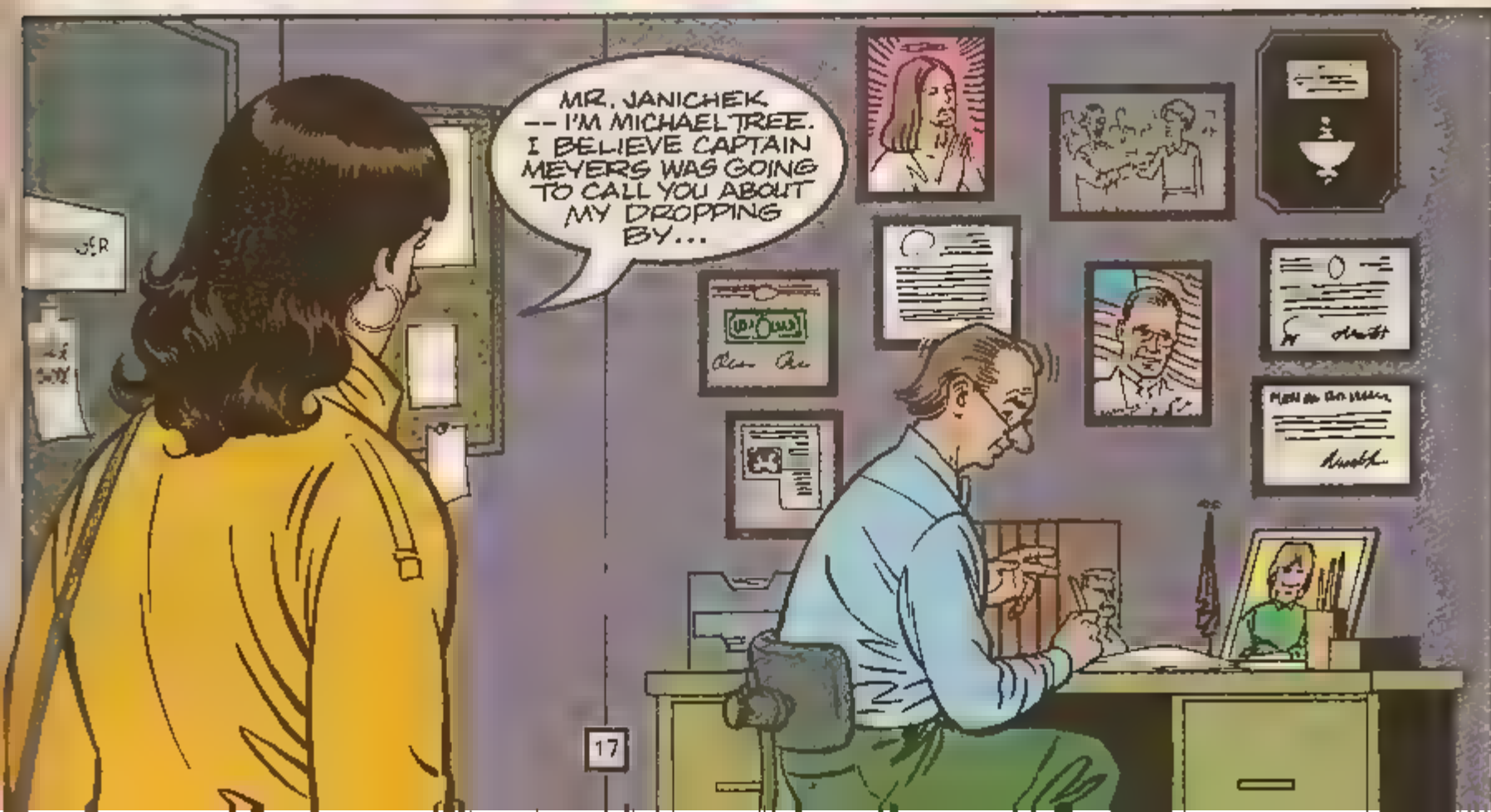
HE SHOWED ME THE DEATH SITES OF THOSE OTHER GIRLS, WHICH WERE NEARBY. THEN I THANKED THE RANGER FOR HIS TIME, WALKED BACK TO MY CAR AND DROVE INTO BLOOMINGTON.

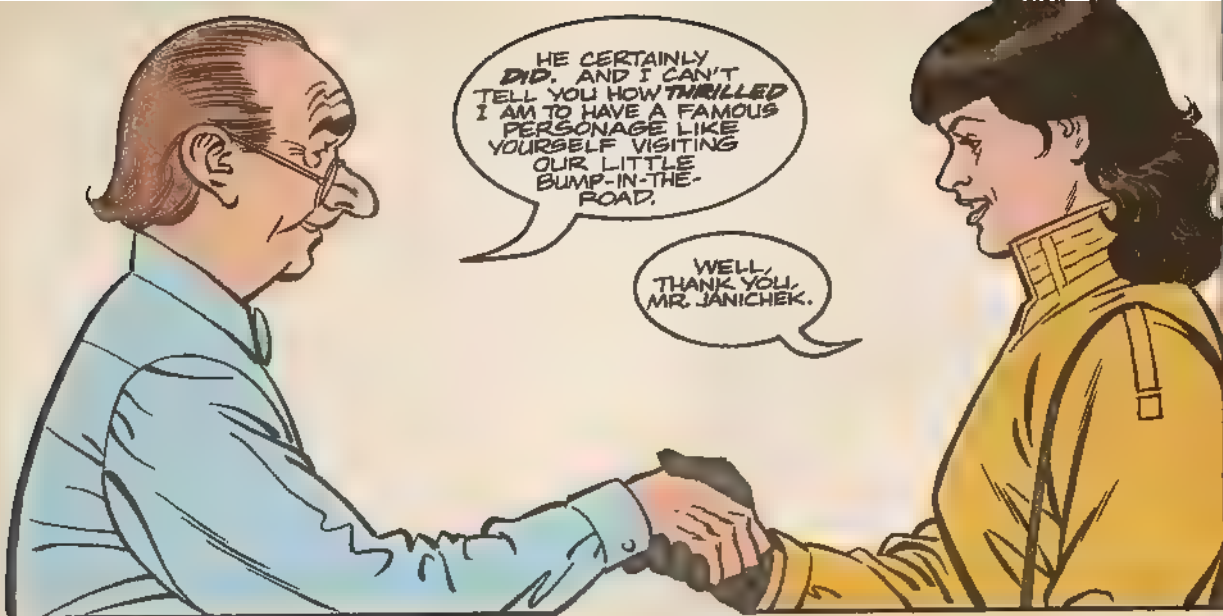
EVEN THE NOTION OF EVIL SEEMED OUT OF PLACE, HERE.



THE NAME CAPTAIN MEYERS HAD GIVEN ME WAS ONE PHILMORE JANICHEK; I'D BEEN TOLD JANICHEK WAS PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AND CHAIRMAN OF THE "CLEANSE BLOOMINGTON COMMITTEE."

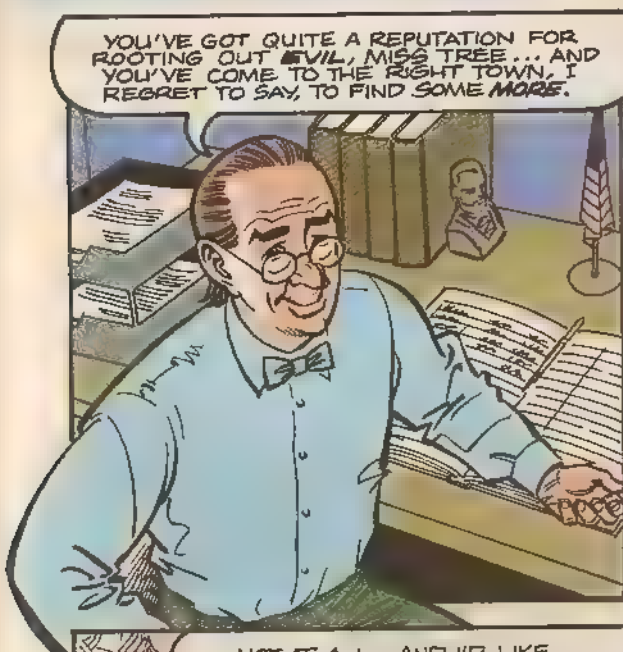
MEYERS HADN'T TOLD ME WHAT BUSINESS JANICHEK WAS IN, BUT THE GUY WAS CLEANSING BLOOMINGTON, ALL RIGHT -- OR ANYWAY, LETTING ANYBODY WITH ENOUGH QUARTERS HAVE A CRACK AT IT.



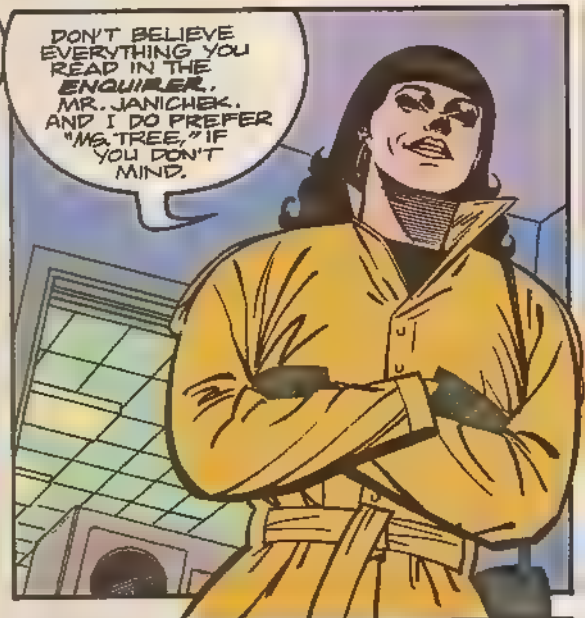


HE CERTAINLY DID. AND I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW THRILLED I AM TO HAVE A FAMOUS PERSONAGE LIKE YOURSELF VISITING OUR LITTLE BUMP-IN-THE-ROAD.

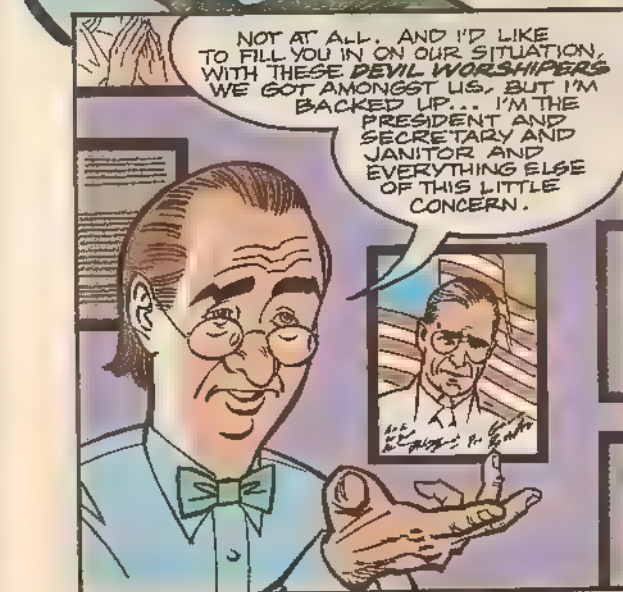
WELL, THANK YOU, MR. JANICHEK.



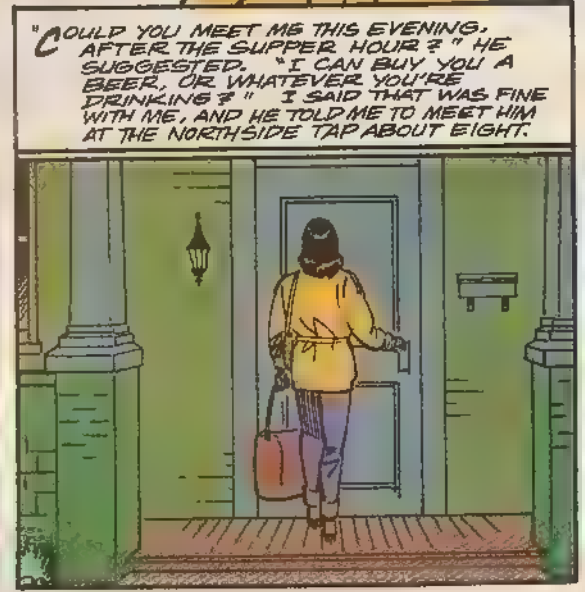
YOU'VE GOT QUITE A REPUTATION FOR ROOTING OUT EVIL, MISS TREE... AND YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT TOWN, I REGRET TO SAY, TO FIND SOME MORE.



DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ IN THE ENQUIRER, MR. JANICHEK. AND I DO PREFER "MS. TREE," IF YOU DON'T MIND.



NOT AT ALL. AND I'D LIKE TO FILL YOU IN ON OUR SITUATION, WITH THESE DEVIL WORSHIPERS WE GOT AMONGST US, BUT I'M BACKED UP... I'M THE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY AND JANITOR AND EVERYTHING ELSE OF THIS LITTLE CONCERN.



"COULD YOU MEET ME THIS EVENING, AFTER THE SUPPER HOUR?" HE SUGGESTED. "I CAN BUY YOU A BEER, OR WHATEVER YOU'RE DRINKING?" I SAID THAT WAS FINE WITH ME, AND HE TOLD ME TO MEET HIM AT THE NORTHSIDE TAP ABOUT EIGHT.

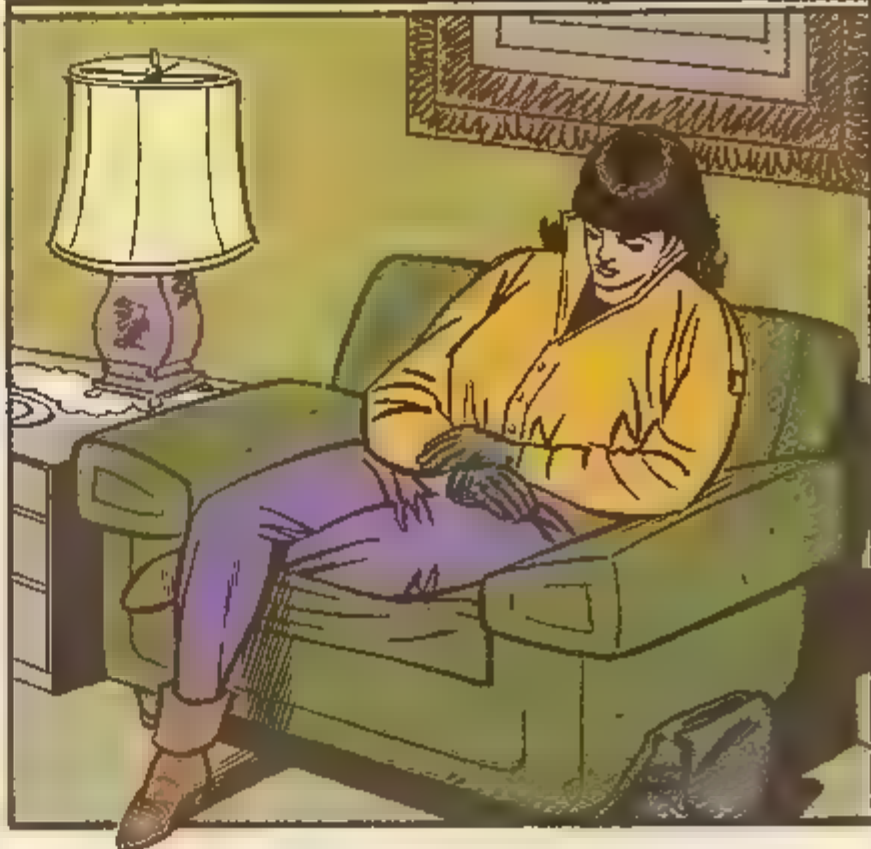
I WOULDN'T NEED A MOTEL IN BLOOMINGTON. MY STEPSON OWNED THIS HOUSE -- HIS GRANDMOTHER HAD LIVED HERE. SHE'D DIED HERE, TOO. IT STILL SMELLED LIKE DEATH -- DUST AND DEATH.



THE PROPERTY HAD BEEN IN PROBATE TILL RECENTLY. FUNNY: JUST A WEEK AGO I'D HAD THE ELECTRICITY TURNED BACK ON, AND PLACED IT WITH A REALTOR. I HADN'T EXPECTED ANYBODY TO MOVE IN SO SOON -- ESPECIALLY NOT ME.



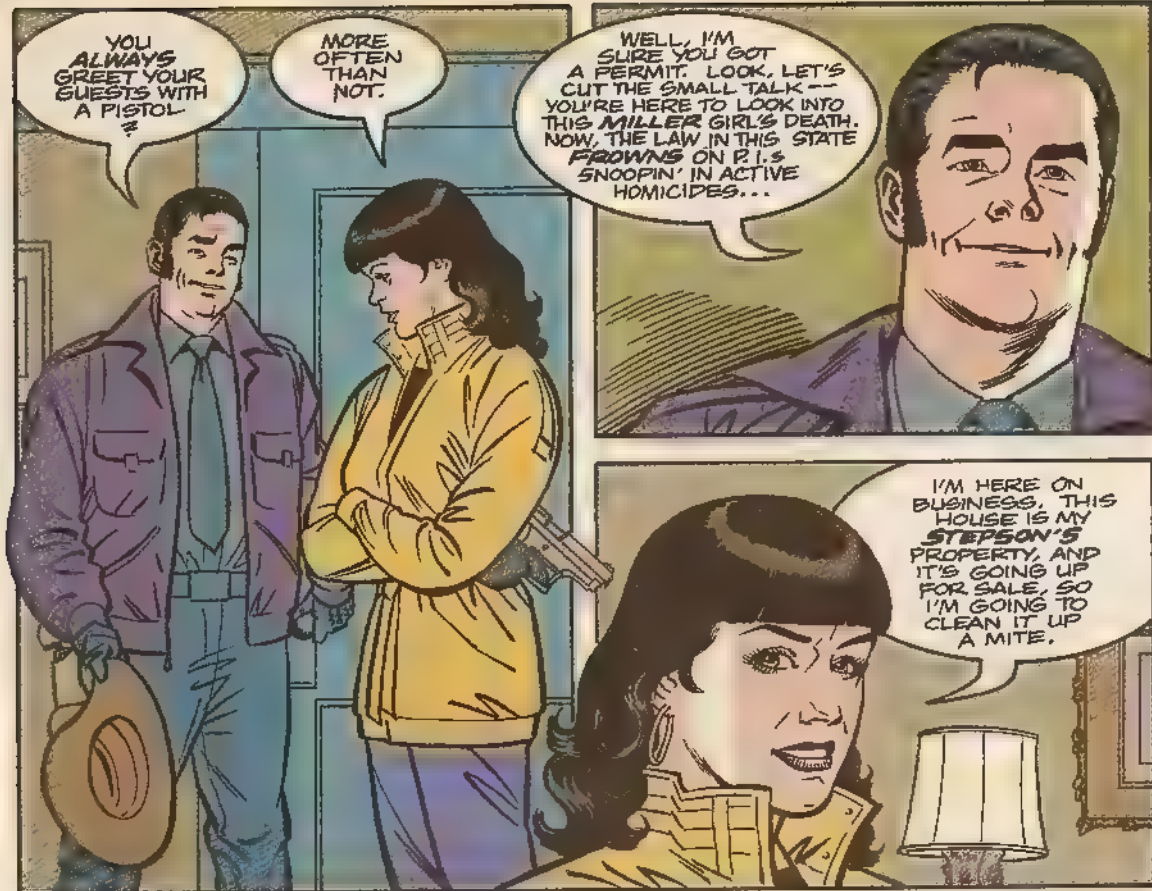
I KNEW I SHOULD GET SOMETHING TO EAT, BUT THE THOUGHT OF IT LEFT ME COLD. WALKING AROUND WILD CAT DEN, LOOKING AT WHERE YOUNG WOMEN HAD BEEN SLAIN, HAD KILLED MY APPETITE.



I'M SHERIFF PAUL THOMAS FROM OVER AT THE COUNTY SEAT. YOU'RE MS. TREE, AREN'T YOU? MIND IF I STEP INSIDE? GETTIN' A MITE CHILLY.

I'M MS. TREE, AND YOU CAN COME IN IF YOU DON'T SAY "A MITE" AGAIN.





YOU ALWAYS GREET YOUR GUESTS WITH A PISTOL?

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT.

WELL, I'M SURE YOU GOT A PERMIT. LOOK, LET'S CUT THE SMALL TALK -- YOU'RE HERE TO LOOK INTO THIS MILLER GIRL'S DEATH. NOW, THE LAW IN THIS STATE FROWNS ON P.I.'S SNOOPIN' IN ACTIVE HOMICIDES...

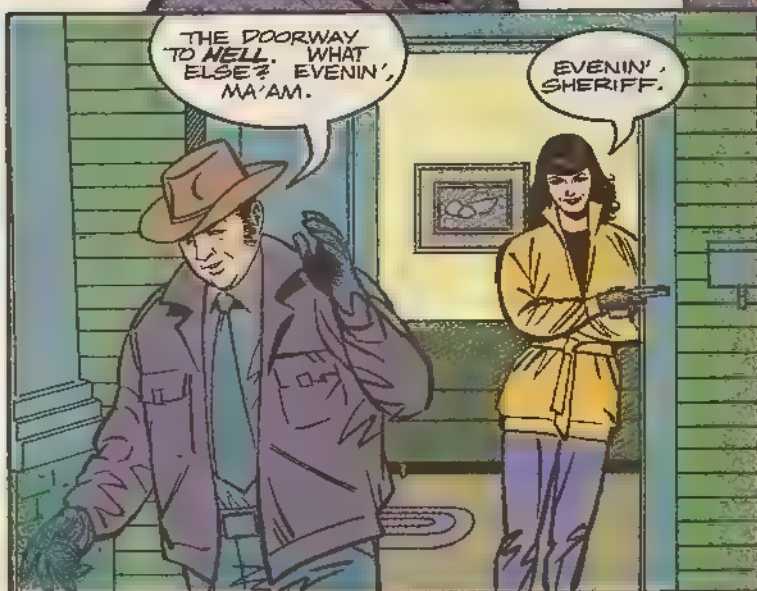
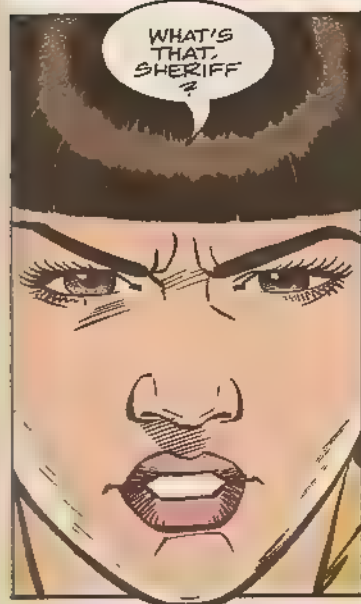
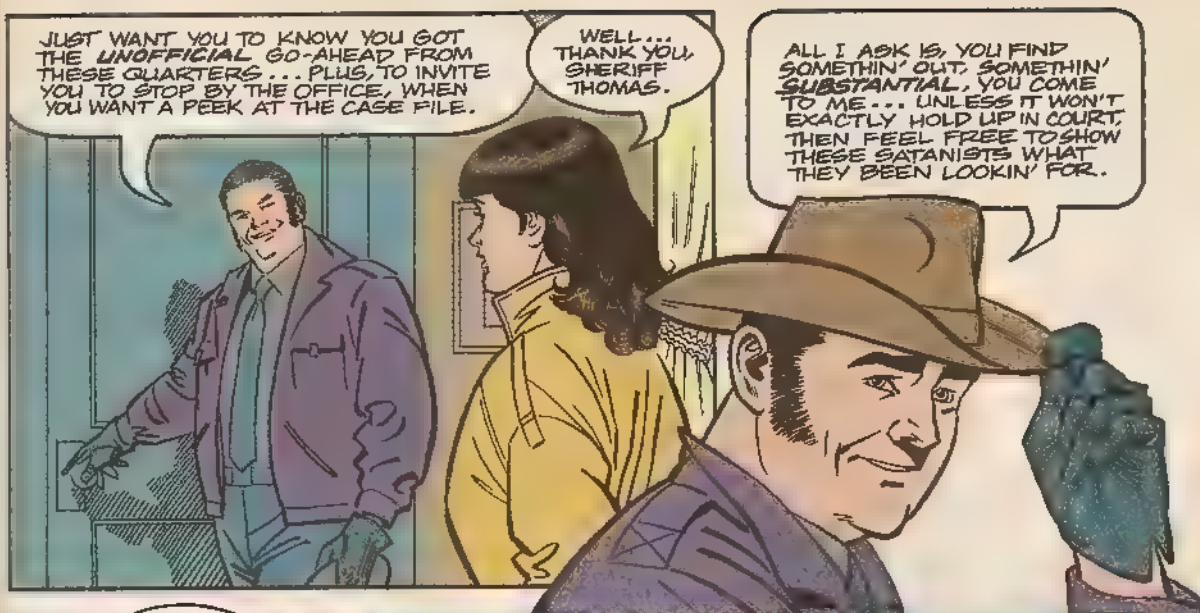
I'M HERE ON BUSINESS. THIS HOUSE IS MY STEPSON'S PROPERTY, AND IT'S GOING UP FOR SALE, SO I'M GOING TO CLEAN IT UP A MITE.

YOU GOT ME ALL WRONG, LADY. THIS IS A FRIENDLY VISIT. SEE, THE MILLER CASE AIN'T "ACTIVE," AND I GOT BIGGER FISH TO FRY, RIGHT NOW.

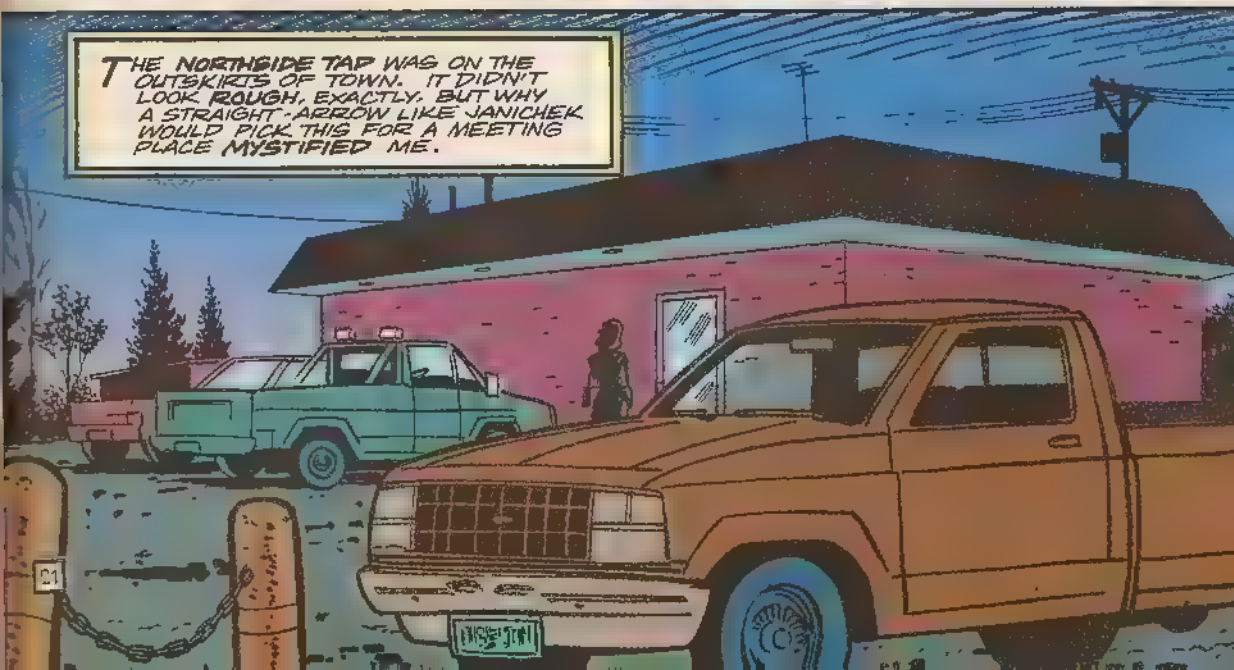
"THOSE SATANISTS DID THAT CRIME," THE SHERIFF SAID. "I KNOW IT IN MY BONES BUT I CAN'T PROVE IT. FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, YOU GOT YOUR OWN WAYS OF DOING THINGS."

SO WHAT'S YOUR POINT, SHERIFF?

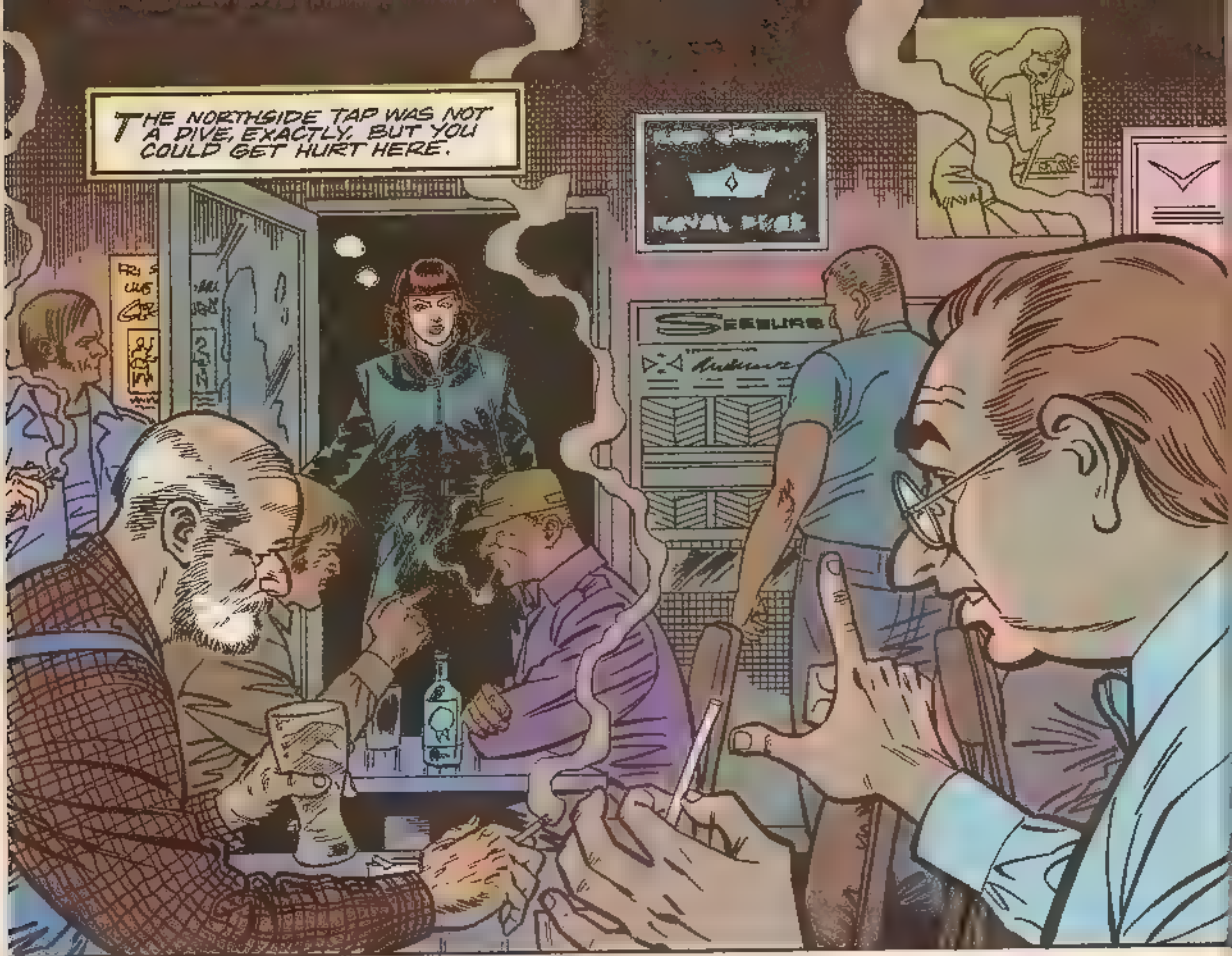




THE **NORTHSIDE TAP** WAS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN. IT DIDN'T LOOK ROUGH, EXACTLY, BUT WHY A STRAIGHT-ARROW LIKE JANICHEK WOULD PICK THIS FOR A MEETING PLACE MYSTIFIED ME.

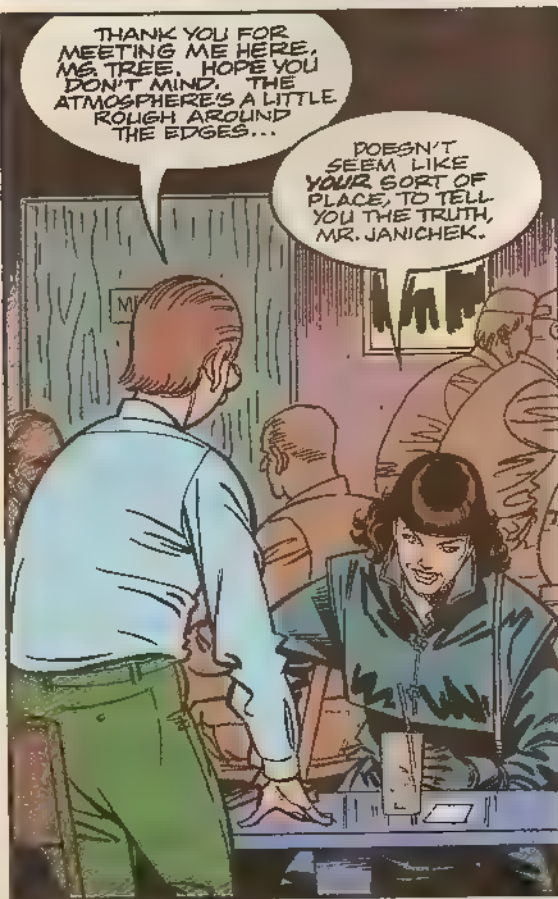


THE NORTHSIDE TAP WAS NOT A DIVE, EXACTLY, BUT YOU COULD GET HURT HERE.



THANK YOU FOR MEETING ME HERE, MS. TREE. HOPE YOU DON'T MIND, THE ATMOSPHERE'S A LITTLE ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES...

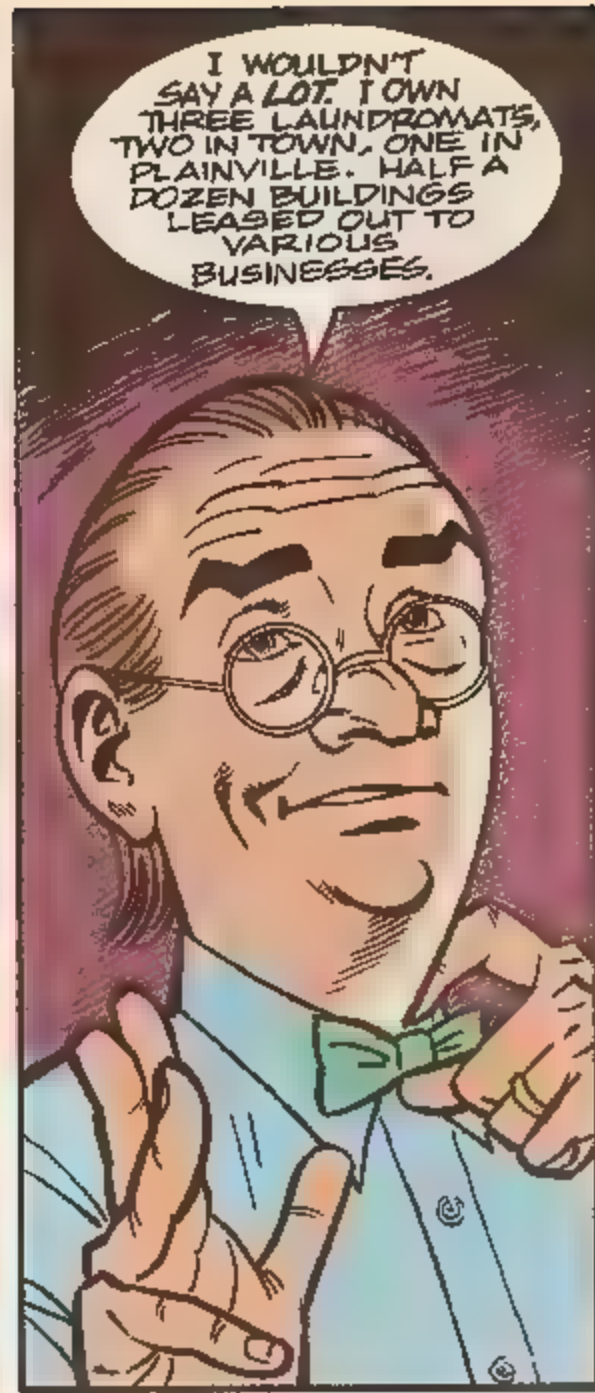
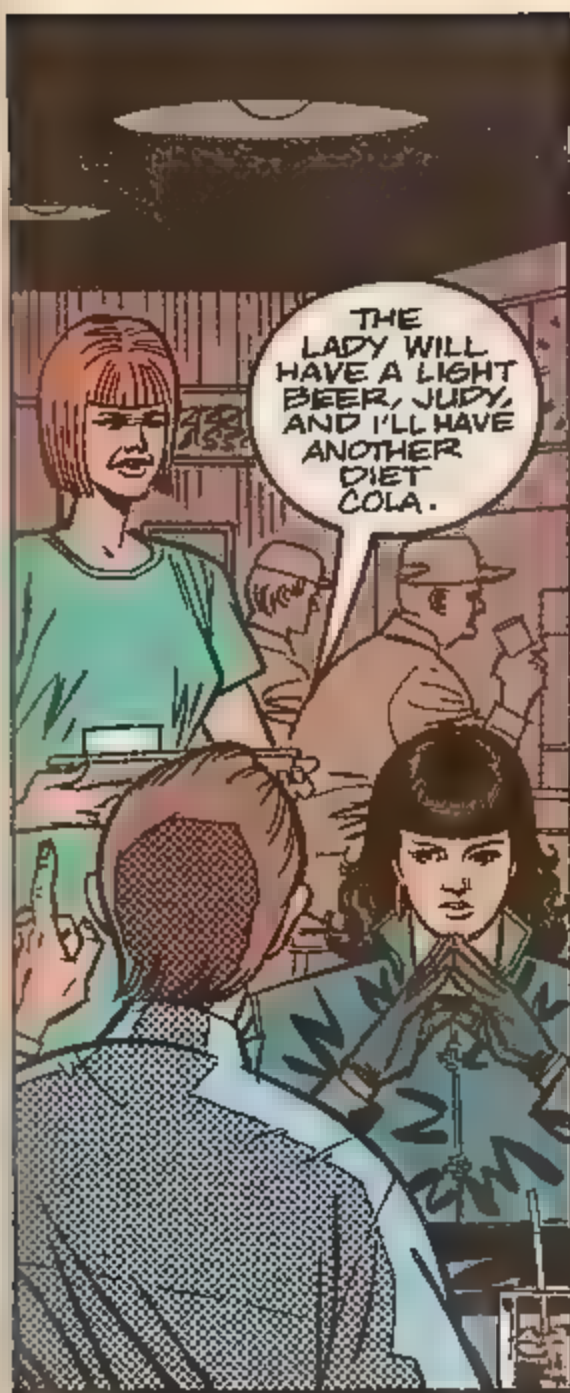
DOESN'T SEEM LIKE YOUR SORT OF PLACE, TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH, MR. JANICHEK.



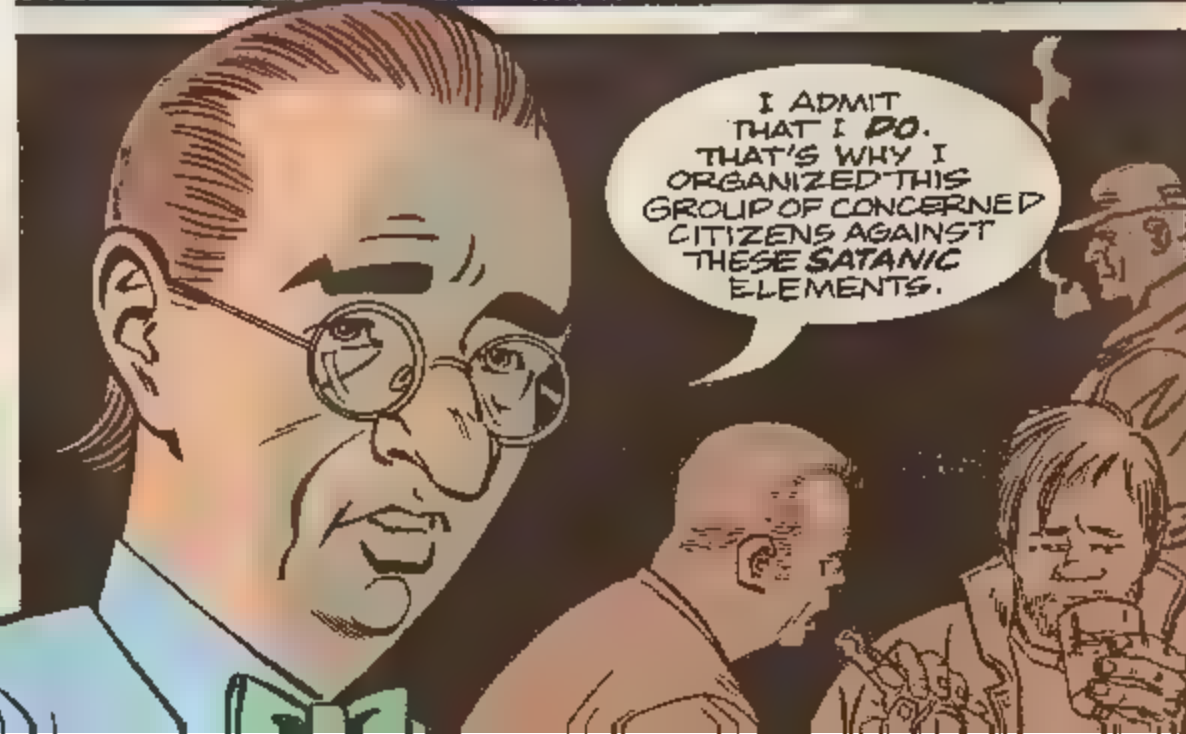
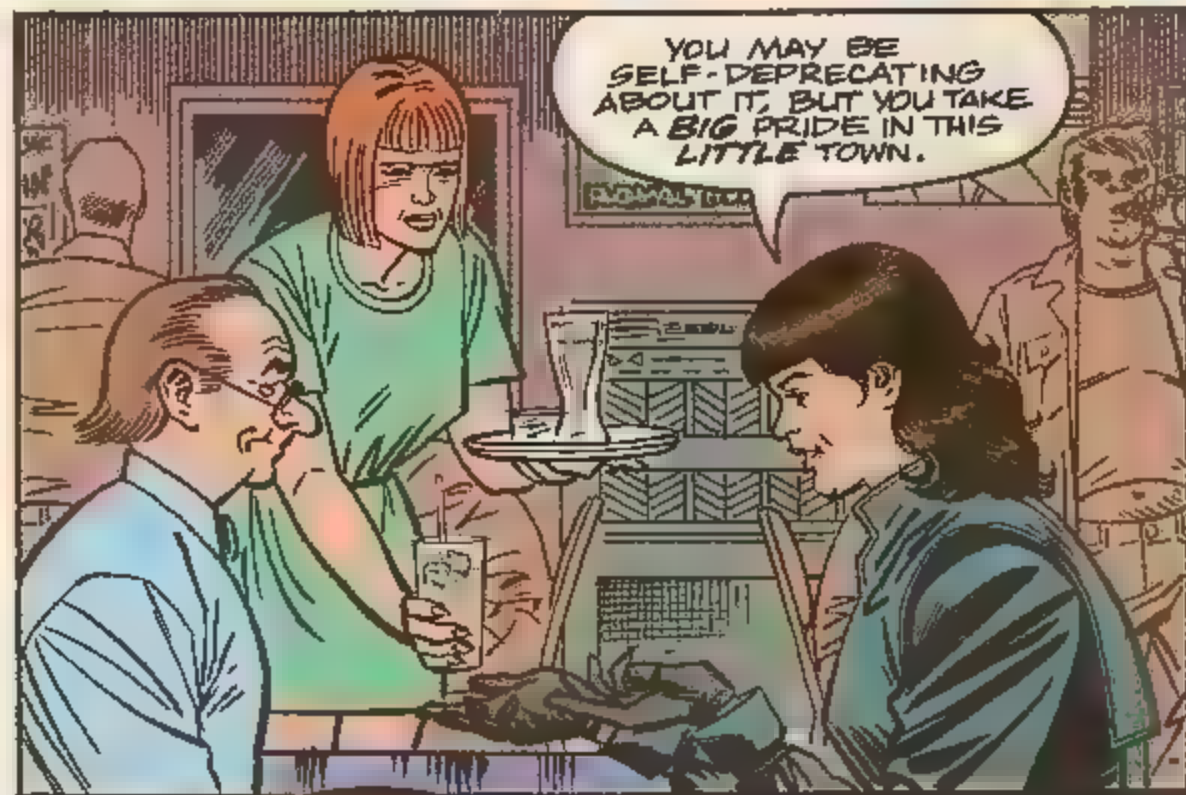
WELL, ACTUALLY, I HAD TO STOP BY, ANYWAY... I'M THE LANDLORD. AND WHAT YOU AND I HAVE TO TALK ABOUT MIGHT'VE URSET THE MISSUS. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DRINK?

IF THEY HAVE A LIGHT BEER ON DRAFT, THAT'LL DO.



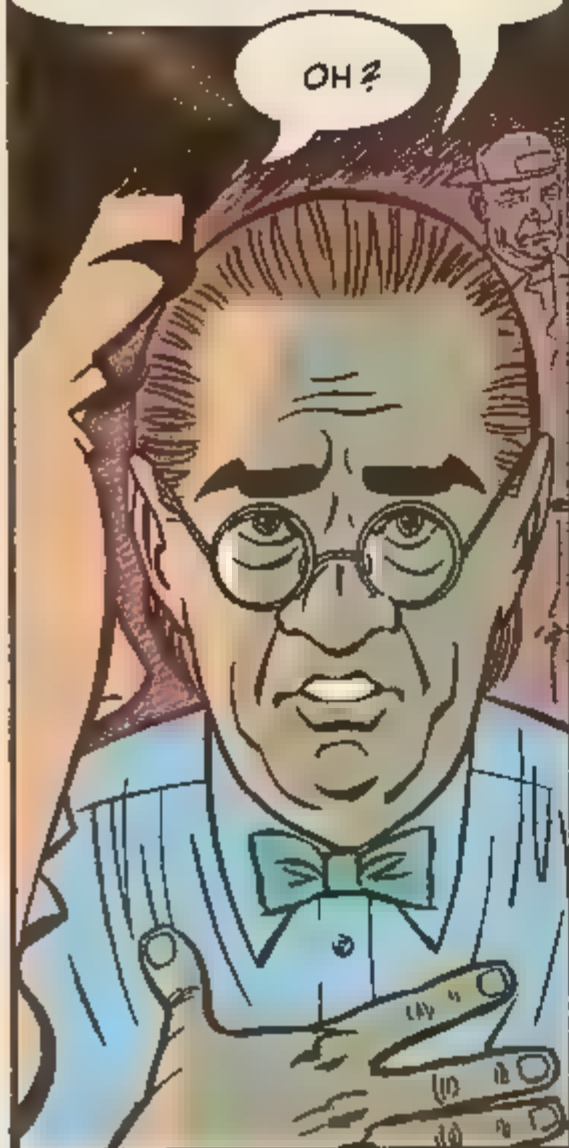


"MY DADDY WAS A FARMER, AND A SUCCESSFUL ONE, BUT THAT BUSINESS DIDN'T INTEREST ME. INHERITED IT AT A YOUNG AGE, SOLD OUT, AND INVESTED IN REAL ESTATE, AND HERE I AM... A TINY PILLAR OF A TINY COMMUNITY."



MOST OF BLOOMINGTON AGREES WITH ME...SEVERAL OF THE CHURCHES, ESPECIALLY THE LOCAL FUNDAMENTALIST CONGREGATION... BUT I HAVE MY OPPOSITION.

OH?



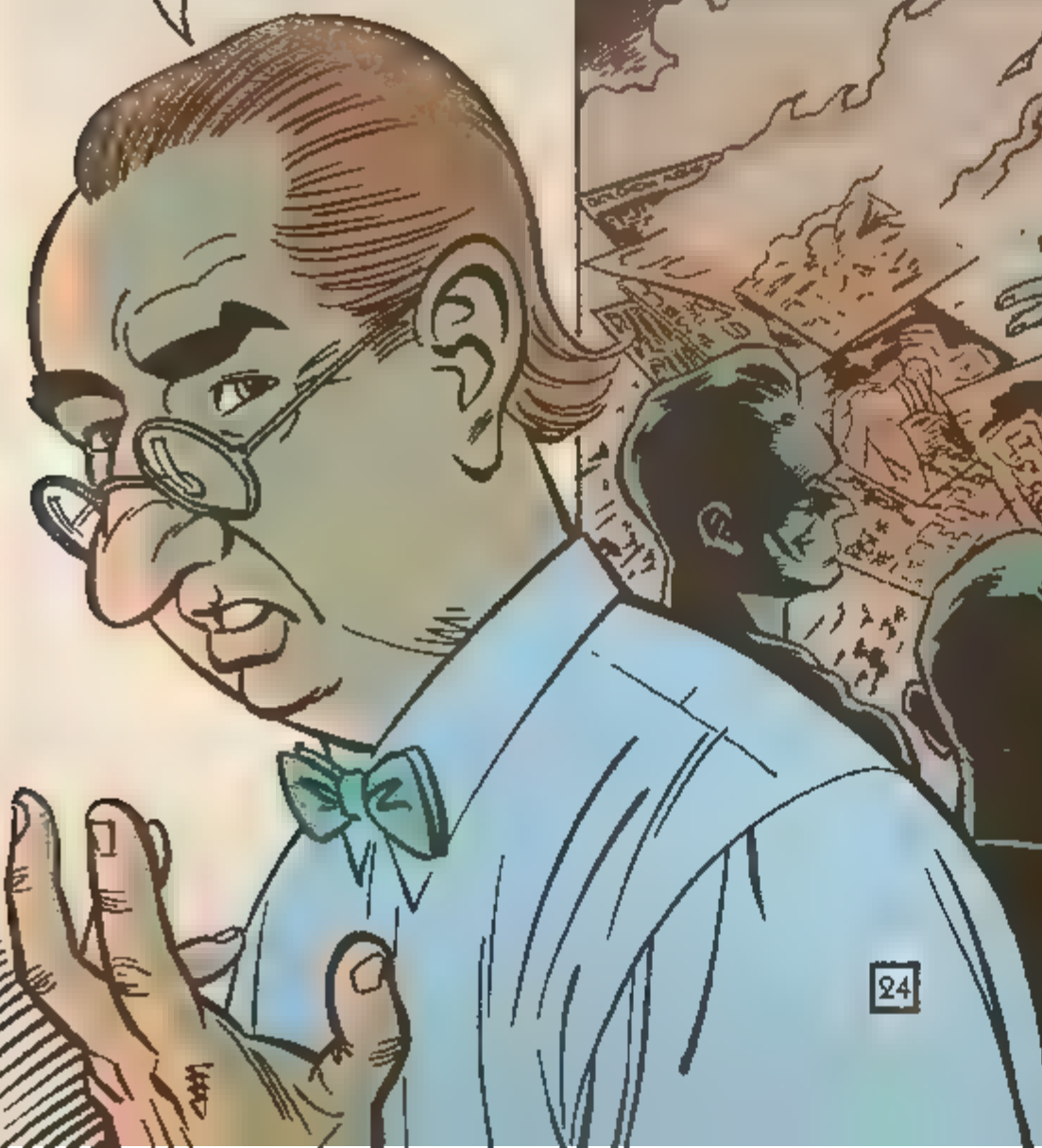
"YES, THERE ARE BUSINESSES IN TOWN -- IN PARTICULAR THE LOCAL PRINT SHOP -- THAT HAVE A FINANCIAL STAKE IN THIS 'CHURCH OF SATANIC ILLUMINATION' OUTFIT."



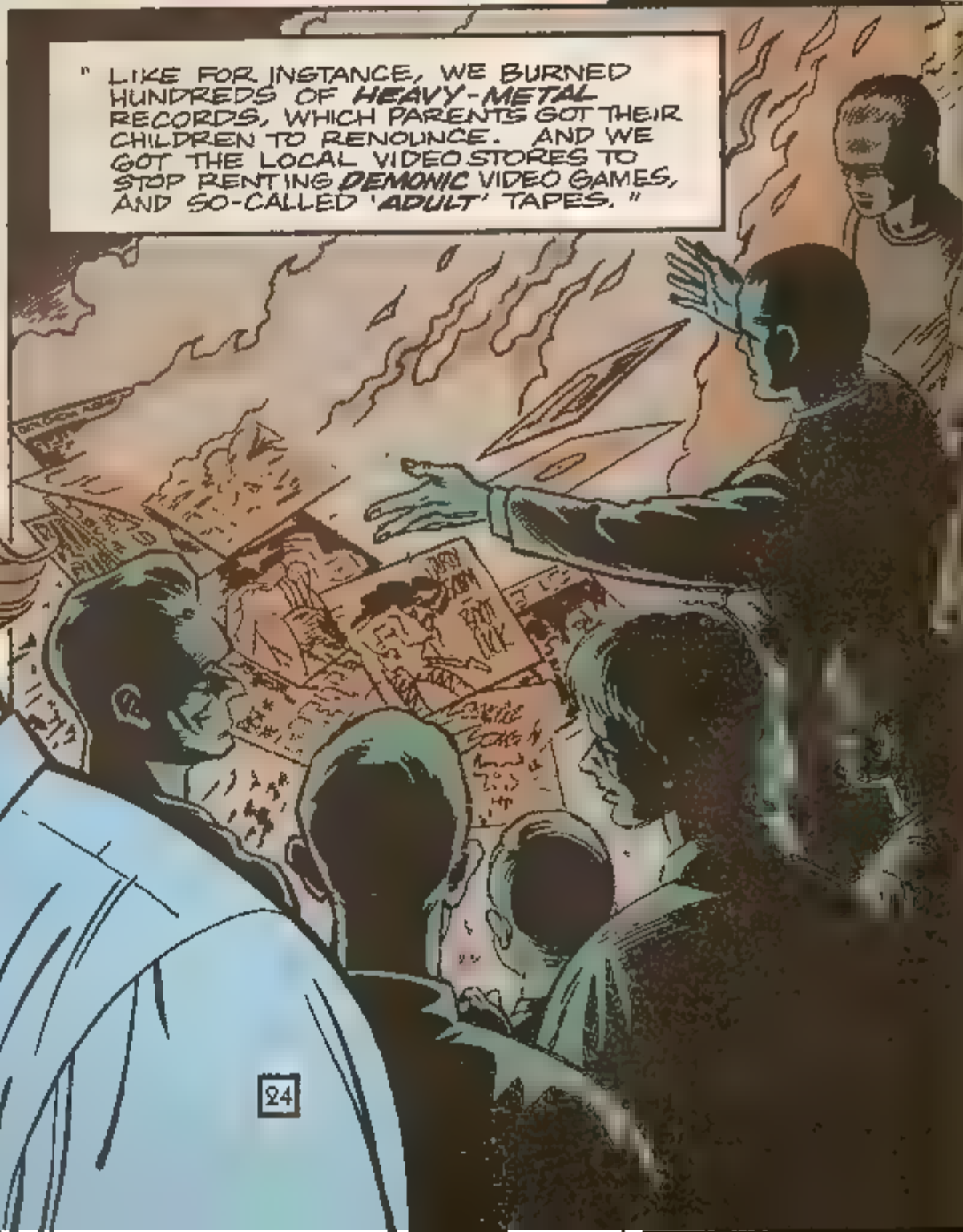
I UNDERSTAND THIS SAM HAIN'S "CHURCH" DOES A CONSIDERABLE MAIL-ORDER BUSINESS ON BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS. SO THAT STUFF'S PRINTED HERE?



YES. BUT THE MAJORITY OF THE COMMUNITY ARE GOOD, GOD-FEARING PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND ME, MS. TREE. WE'VE MANAGED A LOT OF GOOD THINGS.

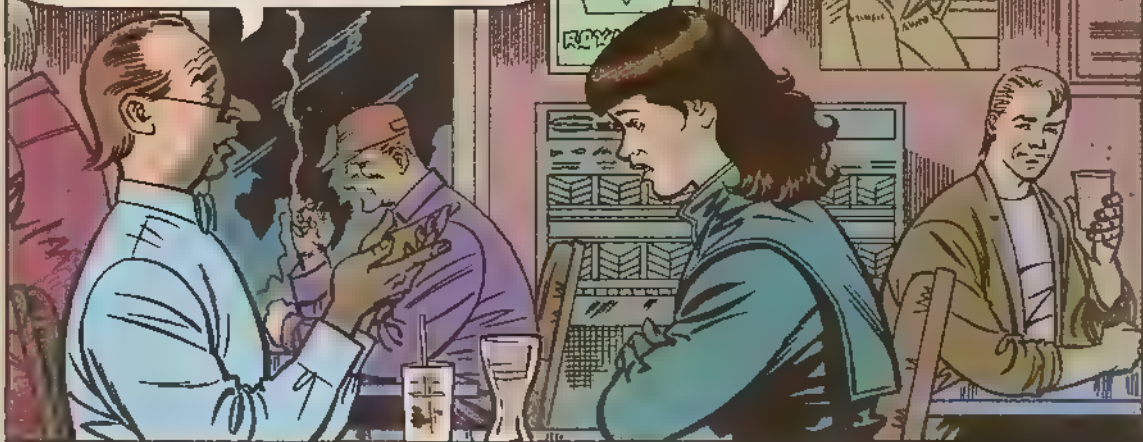


"LIKE FOR INSTANCE, WE BURNED HUNDREDS OF **HEAVY-METAL** RECORDS, WHICH PARENTS GOT THEIR CHILDREN TO RENOUNCE. AND WE GOT THE LOCAL VIDEO STORES TO STOP RENTING **DEMONIC** VIDEO GAMES, AND SO-CALLED 'ADULT' TAPES."

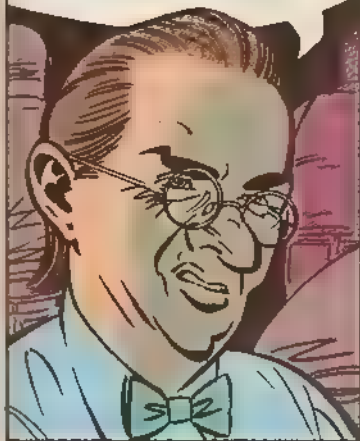


BUT IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR **HARD EVIDENCE** ON THOSE SATANISTS BEING INVOLVED IN THAT POOR CHILD'S MURDER, I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANY MORE HELP THAN THE LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT FELLAS.

IT SOUNDS LIKE THE SATANISTS HAVE EITHER KEPT THEIR NOSES CLEAN ... OR CLEANED UP AFTER THEMSELVES.



I DON'T KNOW 'BOUT THAT. IF THEY WEREN'T OPERATIN' IN A **BACKWATER** LIKE BLOOMINGTON, THEY WOULDN'T GET AWAY WITH THEIR **BLASPHEMY**.



"YOU MEAN, THE LITERATURE THEY'RE SELLING BY MAIL ORDER?"
"NO," JANICHEK SAID. "THE STRANGE RITUALS... GRAVES DISTURBED... CATTLE MUTILATIONS..."

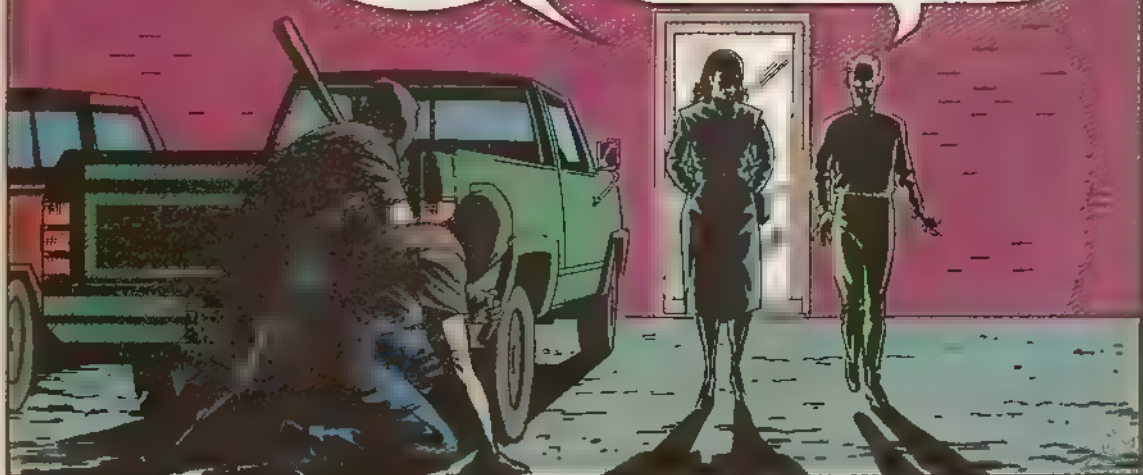


SINCE THOSE SATANISTS MOVED IN, WE'VE HAD HALF A DOZEN COWS TURN UP DRAINED OF BLOOD, VARIOUS BODY PARTS REMOVED WITH **SURGICAL PRECISION** -- SPECIFICALLY EYES AND SEX ORGANS.

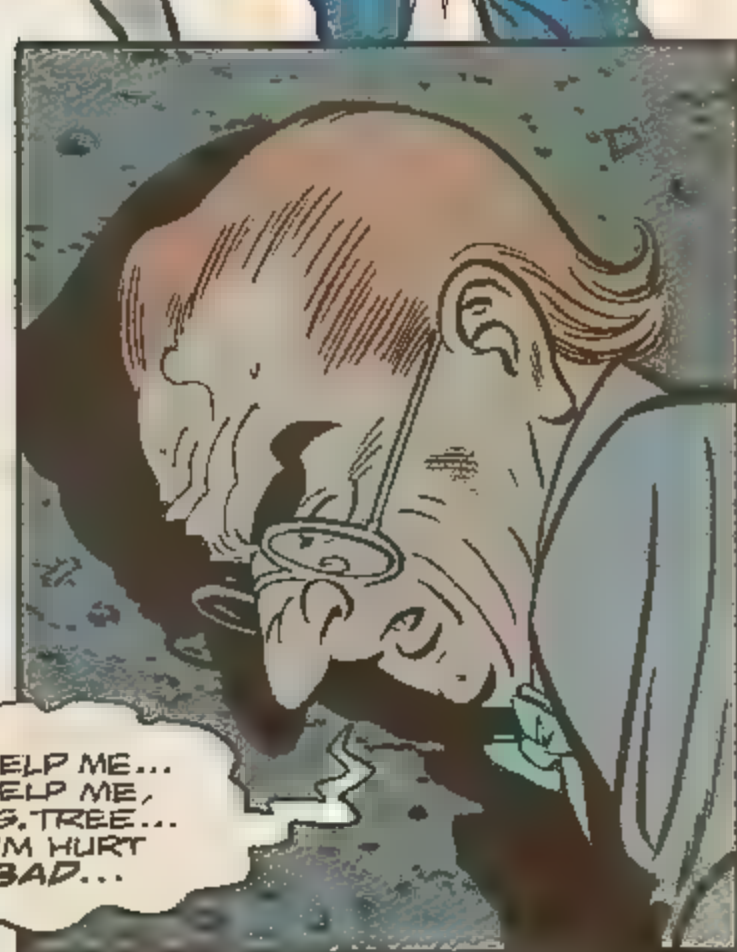


WELL, I THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME, MR. JANICHEK.

WISH I COULDA BEEN OF MORE **HELP**. YOU MIGHT WANT TO COME 'ROUND AND CHAT WITH THE FOLKS AT OUR NEXT 'CONCERNED CITIZENS' MEETING'...









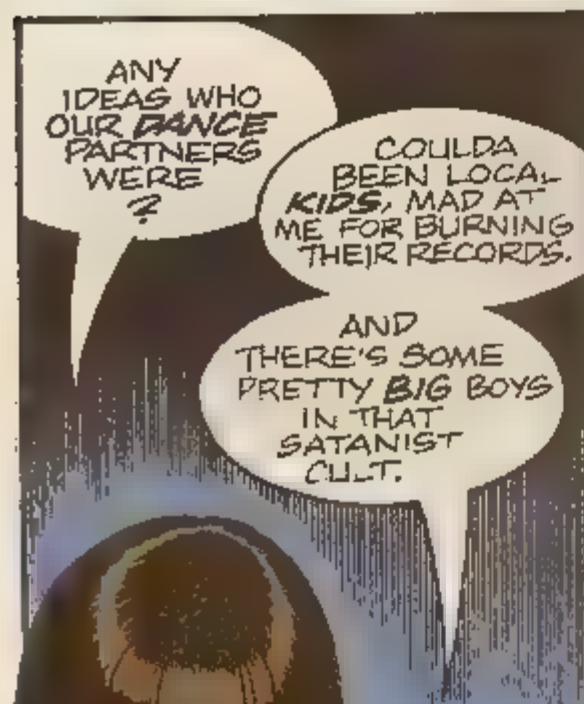
I HURT...
I HURT
BAD.

WE'LL
GET YOU TO
A DOCTOR,
MR JANICHEK.

THE BOYS
IN HOODS
HOPPED IN A
BLUE FORD
PICK-UP,
THE LICENSE
PLATE SMEARED
WITH DIRT...
AND WERE
GONE IN A
CLOUD OF
GRAVEL AND
DUST.

CAN
YOU STAND
?

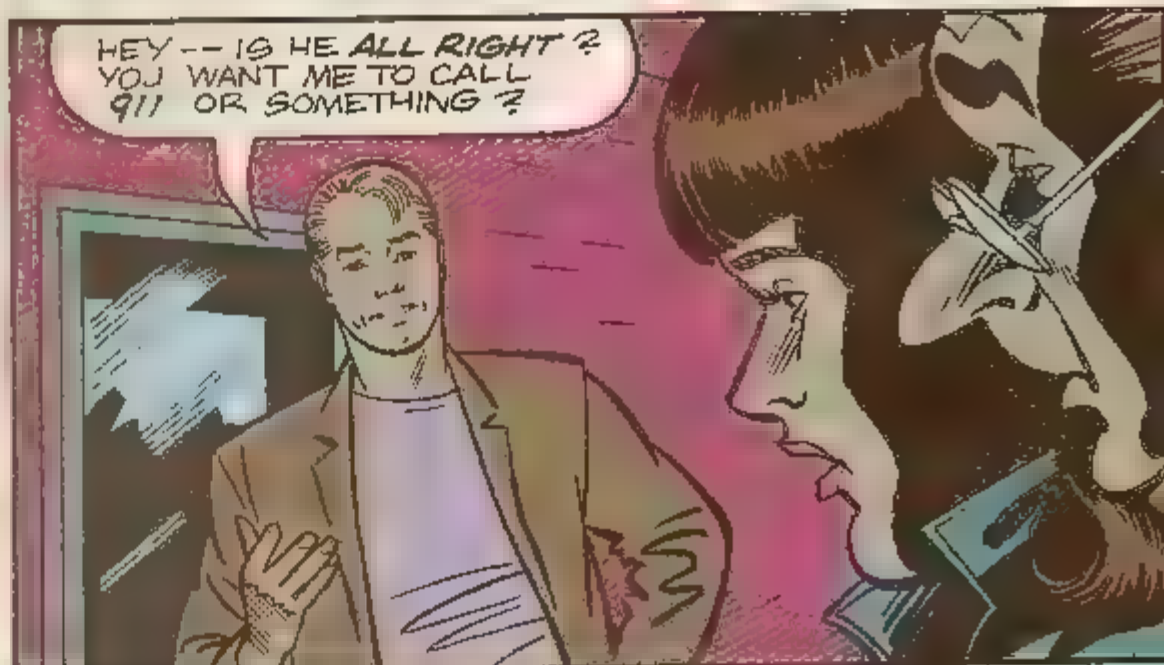
YES
...YES.



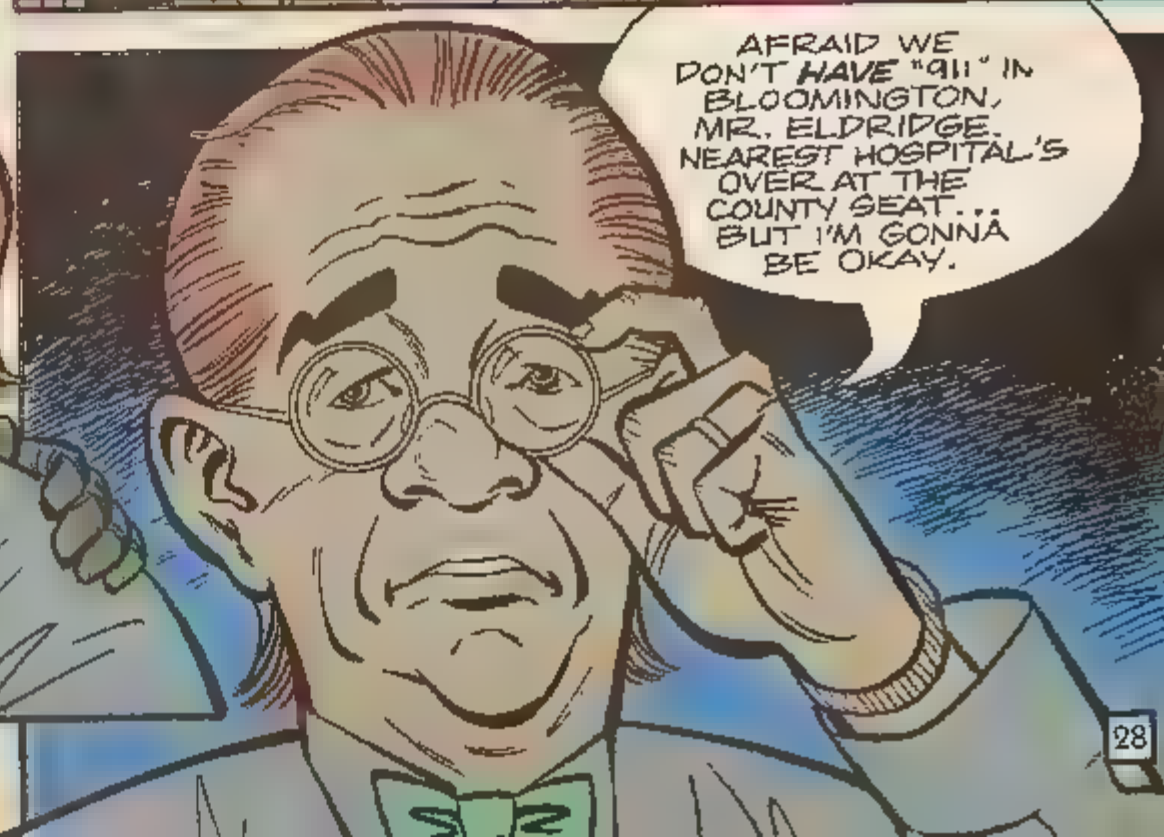
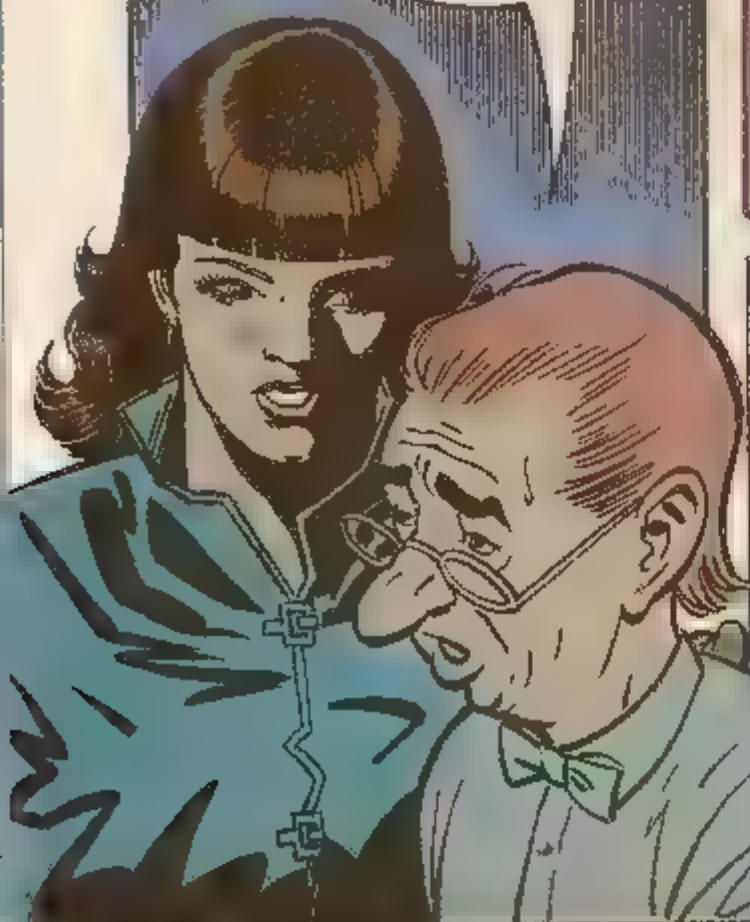
ANY
IDEAS WHO
OUR DANCE
PARTNERS
WERE
?

COULDA
BEEN LOCAL
KIDS, MAD AT
ME FOR BURNING
THEIR RECORDS.

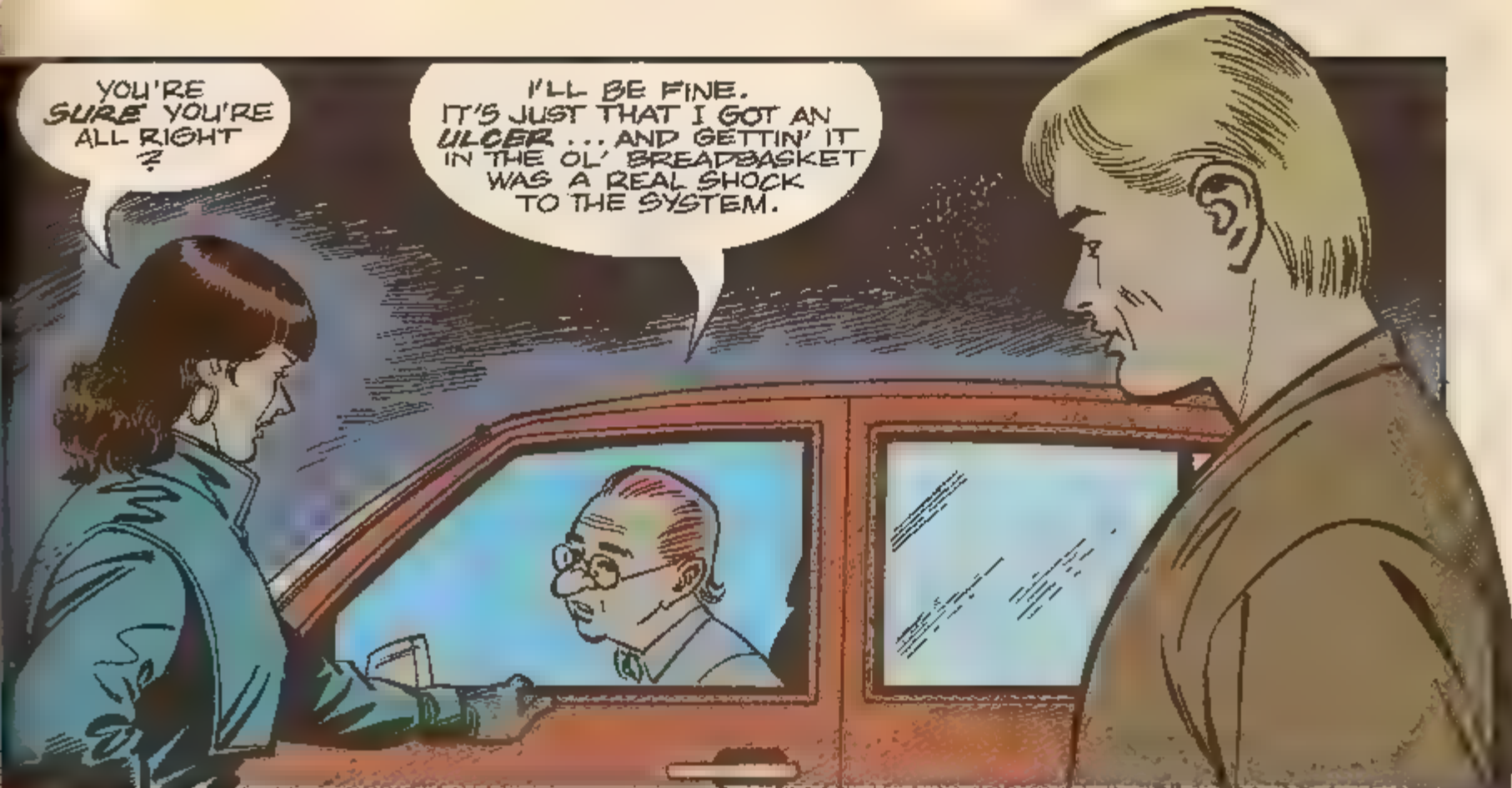
AND
THERE'S SOME
PRETTY BIG BOYS
IN THAT
SATANIST
CULT.



HEY -- IS HE ALL RIGHT ?
YOU WANT ME TO CALL
911 OR SOMETHING ?



AFRAID WE
DON'T HAVE "911" IN
BLOOMINGTON,
MR. ELDRIDGE.
NEAREST HOSPITAL'S
OVER AT THE
COUNTY SEAT...
BUT I'M GONNA
BE OKAY.



YOU'RE
SURE YOU'RE
ALL RIGHT
?

I'LL BE FINE.
IT'S JUST THAT I GOT AN
ULCER ... AND GETTIN' IT
IN THE OL' BREADBASKET
WAS A REAL SHOCK
TO THE SYSTEM.



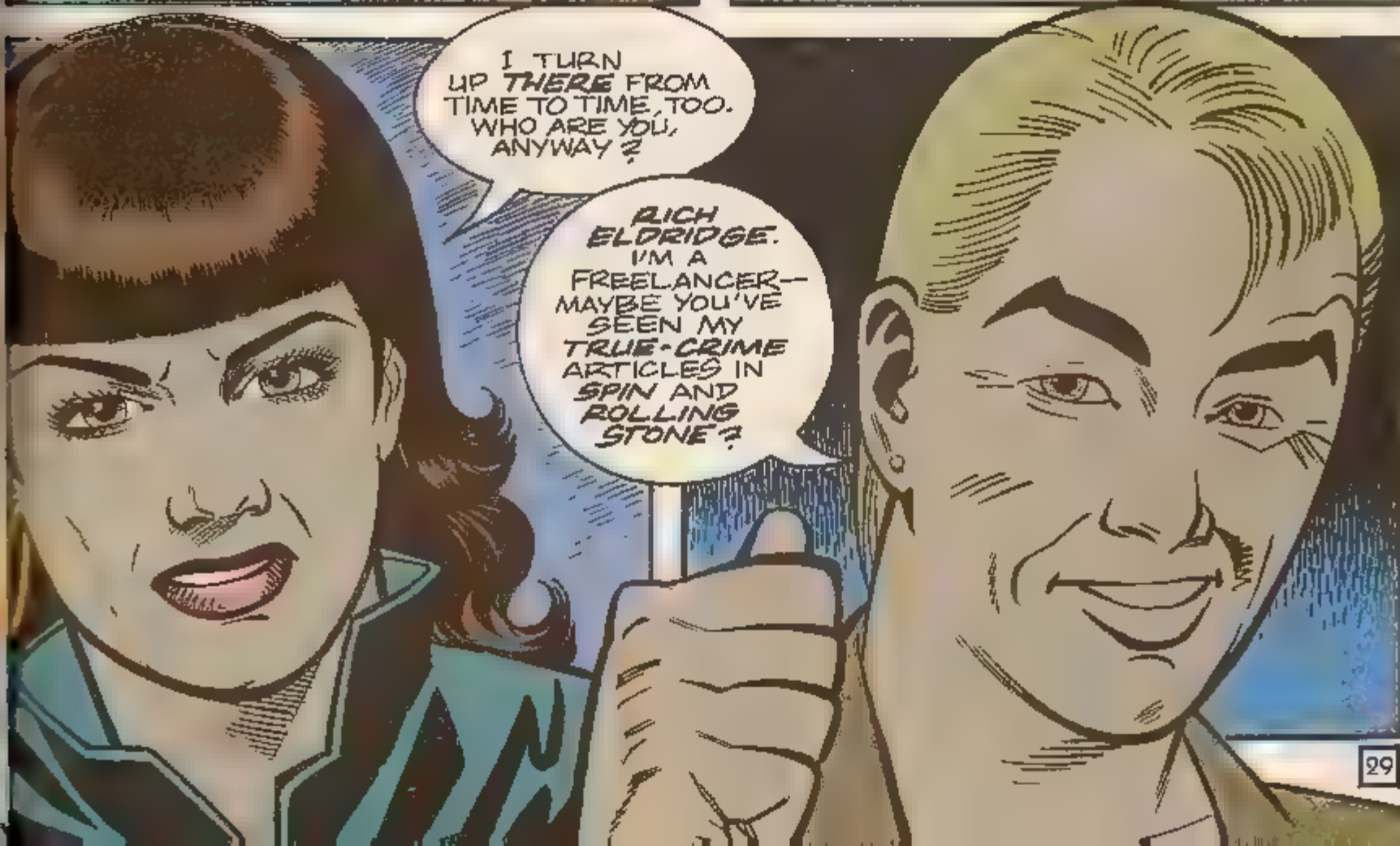
MR. JANICHEK SEEMS
TO **KNOW** YOU ... BUT YOU'RE
OBVIOUSLY NOT **LOCAL**, OR AT
LEAST YOU'RE NEW
TO TOWN.

THAT'S
RIGHT. I'M JUST LIKE
YOU, MS. TREE: A
VISITING **SNOOP**.



YOU
KNOW
WHO I
AM ?

I'M A **REPORTER**,
MS. TREE. ANY MEMBER
OF THE PRESS WHO DOESN'T
RECOGNIZE YOU MUST BE
WORKIN' THE OP-ED
PAGE.



I TURN
UP **THERE** FROM
TIME TO TIME, TOO.
WHO ARE YOU,
ANYWAY ?

**RICH
ELDRIDGE.**
I'M A
FREELANCER—
MAYBE YOU'VE
SEEN MY
TRUE-CRIME
ARTICLES IN
SPIN AND
**ROLLING
STONE** ?



CAN'T SAY I HAVE.

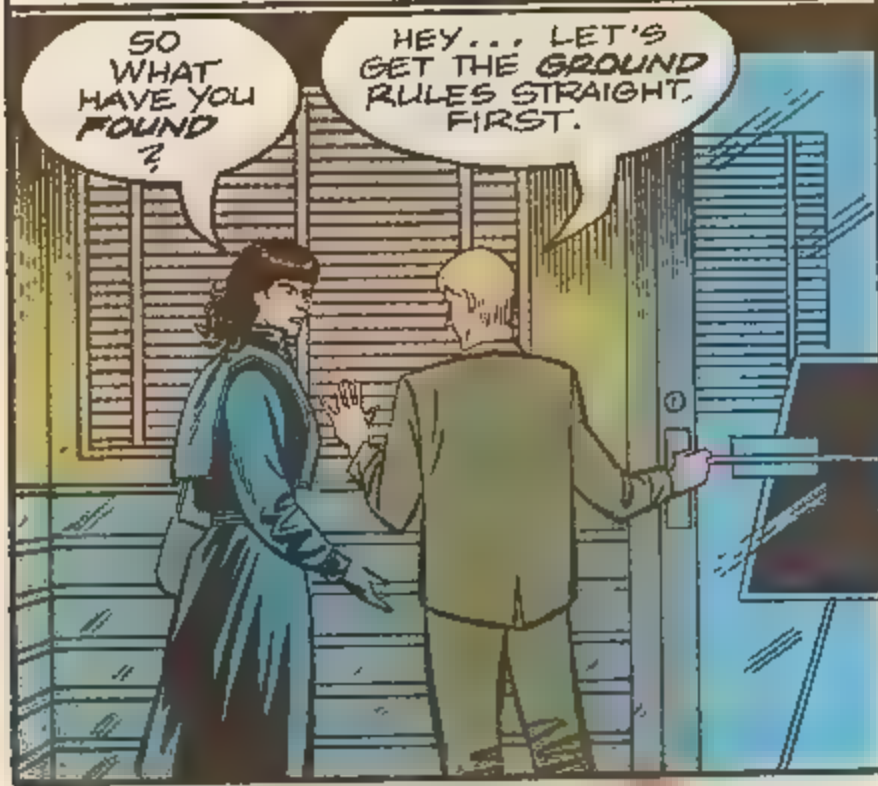
LOOK, I GOT A FEELING WE'RE WORKING THE SAME STORY... OR IS THAT, CASE?

OH?



THERE'S A LOCAL MURDER BEING LAID AT THE FEET OF SATANISTS - THOUGH THERE'S PRECIOUS LITTLE PROOF. BUT I'VE BEEN HERE FOR TWO WEEKS, DIGGING. CARE TO HEAR ABOUT IT?

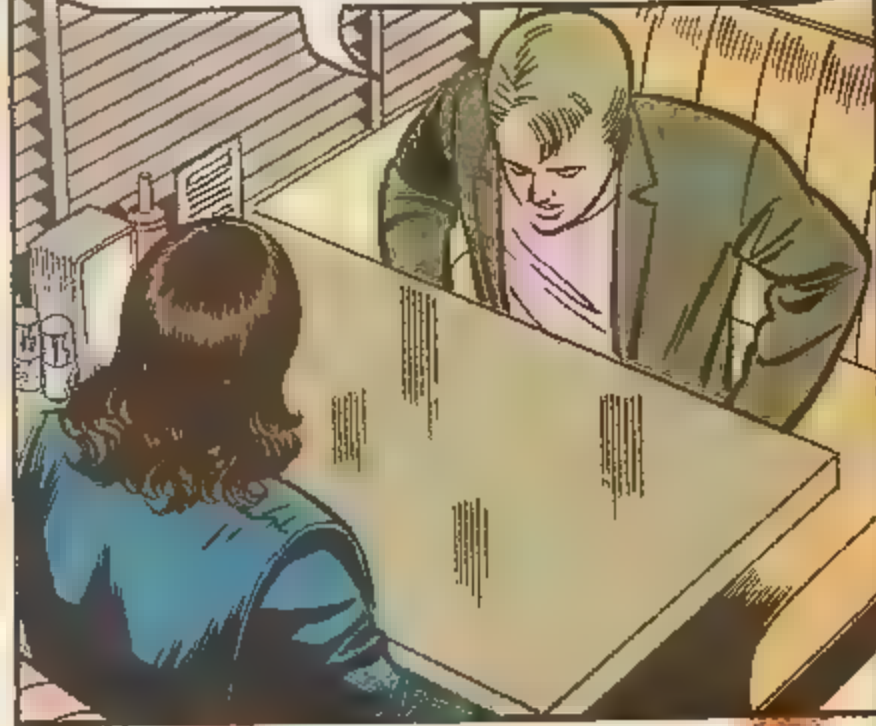
NEITHER ELDRIDGE NOR I WANTED ANOTHER BEER; WE TOOK SEPARATE CARS TO AN ALL-NIGHT TRUCK STOP TWO MILES OUT OF TOWN.



SO WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND?

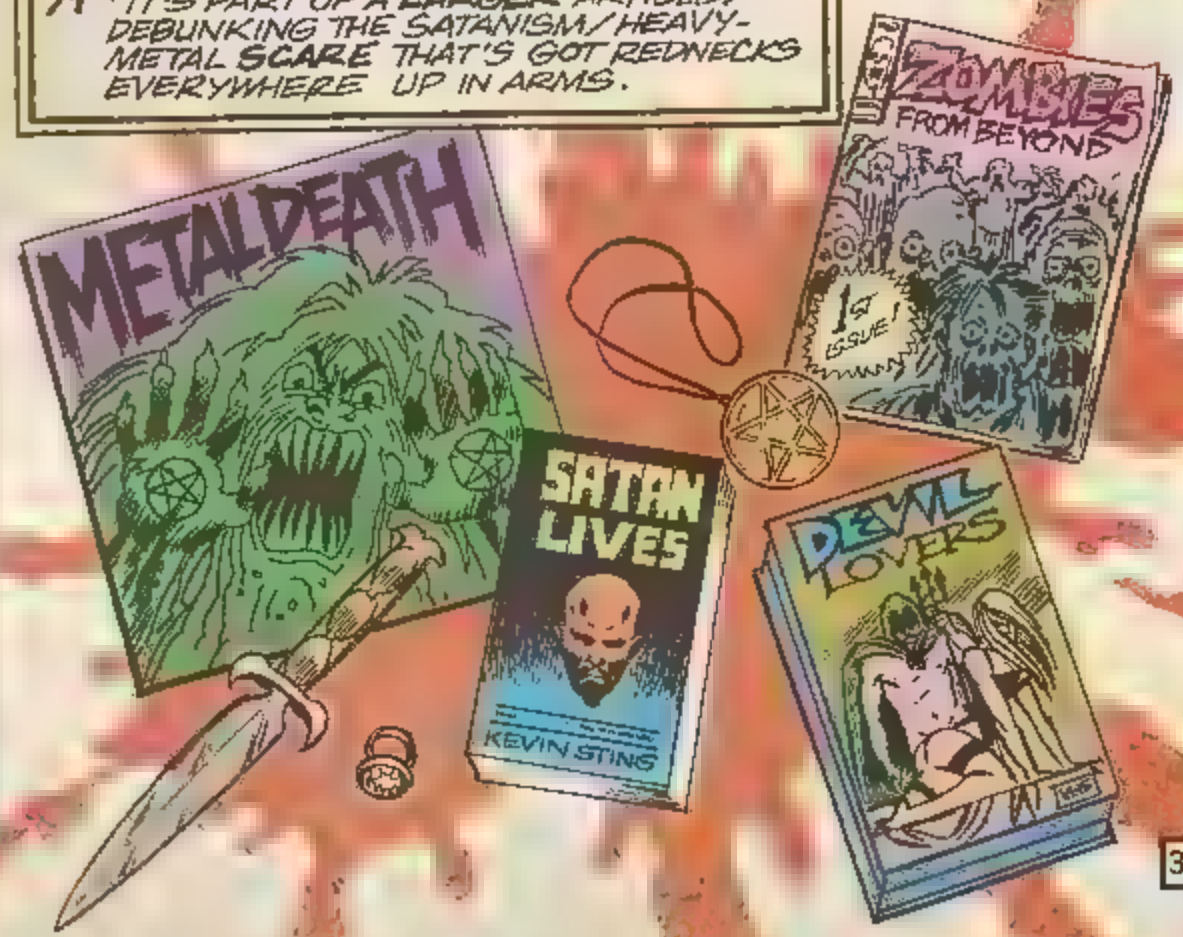
HEY... LET'S GET THE GROUND RULES STRAIGHT, FIRST.

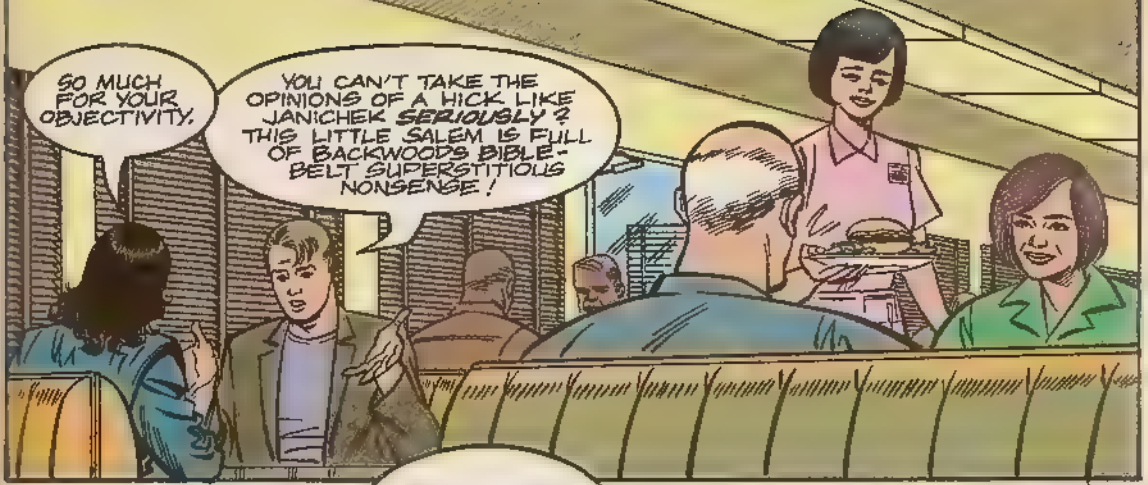
I TRY TO STAY OBJECTIVE WHEN I'M RESEARCHING AN ARTICLE. I DON'T ASSUME THESE SATANISTS DID THAT MURDER, JUST BECAUSE SOME CRUDE INVERTED PENTAGRAM WAS SCRIBBLED ON THE GIRL'S STOMACH.



ARE YOU RESEARCHING THE MILLER GIRL'S DEATH, SPECIFICALLY?

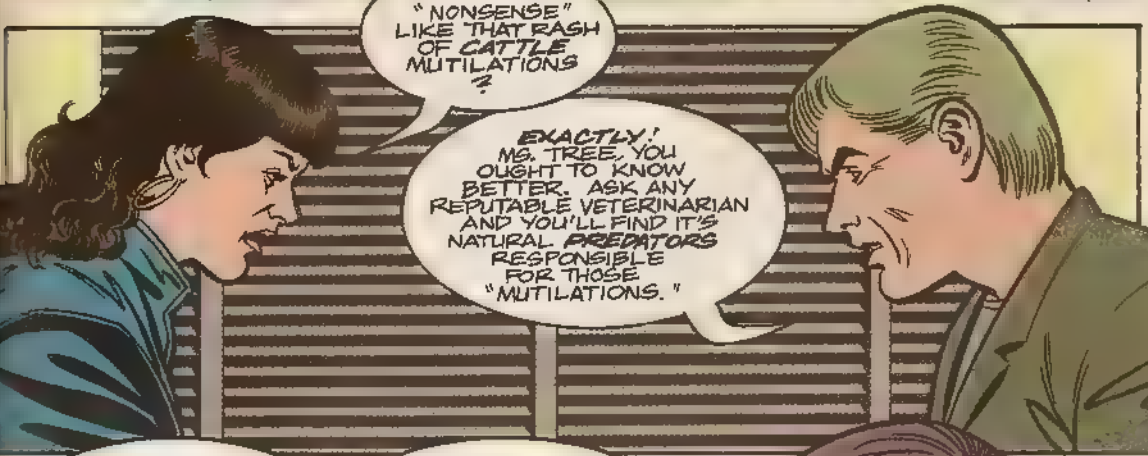
"ACTUALLY, NO," HE SAID. "IT'S PART OF A LARGER ARTICLE, DEBUNKING THE SATANISM/HEAVY-METAL SCARE THAT'S GOT REDNECKS EVERYWHERE UP IN ARMS."





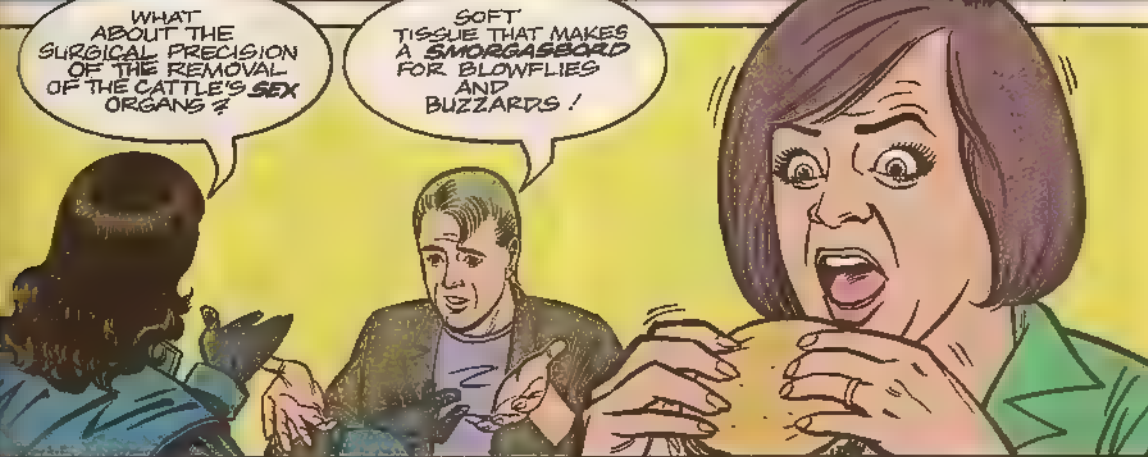
SO MUCH FOR YOUR OBJECTIVITY.

YOU CAN'T TAKE THE OPINIONS OF A HICK LIKE JANICHEK SERIOUSLY? THIS LITTLE SALEM IS FULL OF BACKWOODS BIBLE BELT SUPERSTITIOUS NONSENSE!



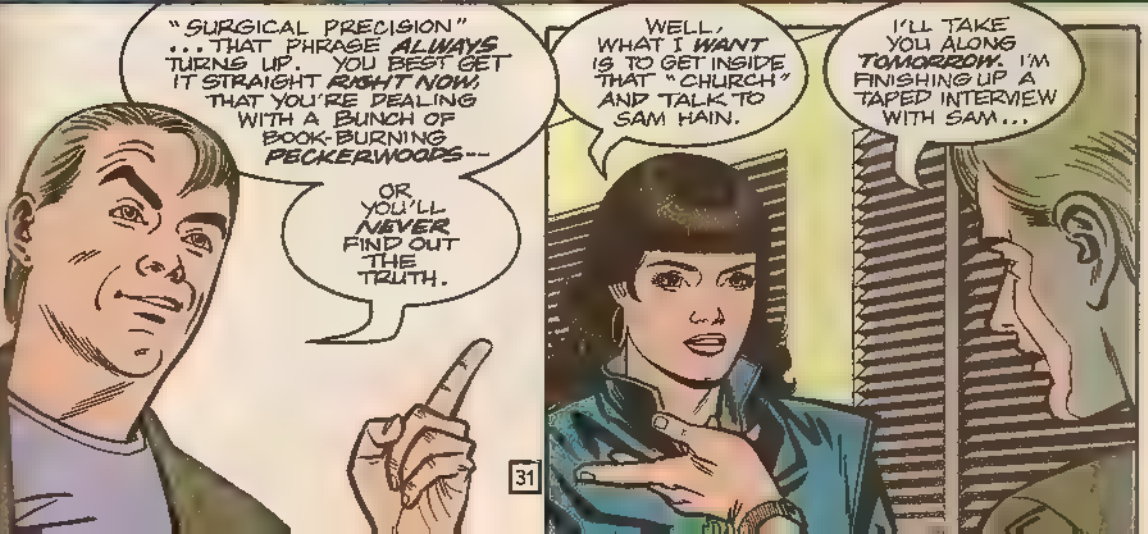
"NONSENSE" LIKE THAT RASH OF CATTLE MUTILATIONS?

EXACTLY! MS. TREE, YOU OUGHT TO KNOW BETTER. ASK ANY REPUTABLE VETERINARIAN AND YOU'LL FIND IT'S NATURAL PREDATORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THOSE "MUTILATIONS."



WHAT ABOUT THE SURGICAL PRECISION OF THE REMOVAL OF THE CATTLE'S SEX ORGANS?

SOFT TISSUE THAT MAKES A SMORGASBOARD FOR BLOWFLIES AND BUZZARDS!



"SURGICAL PRECISION" ... THAT PHRASE ALWAYS TURNS UP. YOU BEST GET IT STRAIGHT RIGHT NOW! THAT YOU'RE DEALING WITH A BUNCH OF BOOK-BURNING PECKERWOODS---

OR YOU'LL NEVER FIND OUT THE TRUTH.

WELL, WHAT I WANT IS TO GET INSIDE THAT "CHURCH" AND TALK TO SAM HAIN.

I'LL TAKE YOU ALONG TOMORROW. I'M FINISHING UP A TAPED INTERVIEW WITH SAM...

THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE CHURCH OF SATANIC ILLUMINATION LOOKED ABOUT AS SINISTER AS A CARTON OF MILK; OF COURSE OUTWARD APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING, AND EVEN AS THAT IMAGE POPPED INTO MY MIND, I RECALLED THAT IN RECENT YEARS MANY A MILK CARTON HAS BORNE A PICTURE OF A MISSING CHILD...

BLESSED BE, BROTHER ELDRIDGE!

MORNING, SAM. BROUGHT A GUEST ALONG. HOPE YOU DON'T MIND.

AND WHO IS OUR ATTRACTIVE, CHARMING GUEST? A POTENTIAL INITIATE IN THE CHURCH?

IN YOUR DREAMS.

THIS IS MICHAEL TREE—THE FAMOUS—OR MAYBE I SHOULD SAY, INFAMOUS—MS. TREE.

THE "FEMALE MIKE HAMMER"—THAT'S WHAT 60 MINUTES CALLED YOU! I SHOULD HAVE RECOGNIZED YOU! YOU'RE ONE OF MY IDOLS!



I'M EMBARRASSED NOT TO HAVE KNOWN YOU! YOU'RE A REAL HEROINE AROUND HERE!

I... I AM?

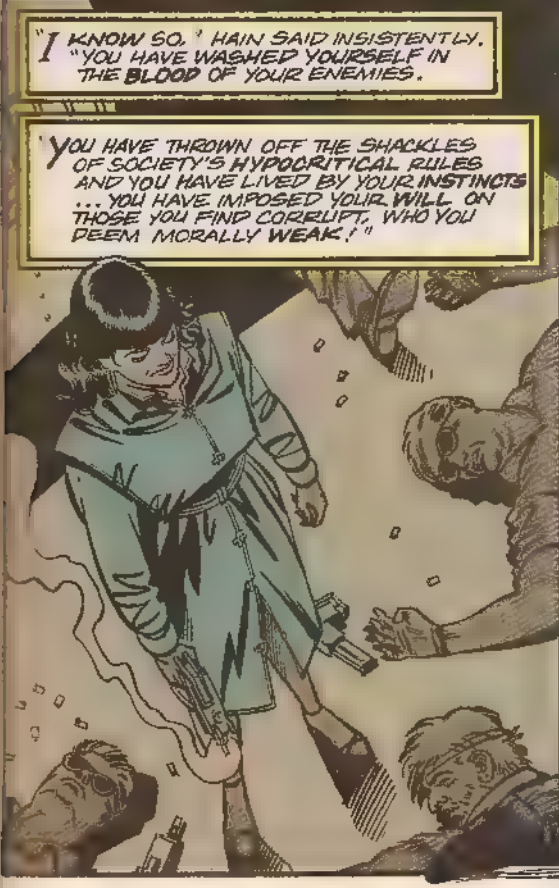


BUT OF COURSE! YOU ARE THE TEMPORAL EMBODIMENT OF SO MANY OF OUR TENETS, OUR PHILOSOPHIES... STARTING WITH "TURN NOT THE OTHER CHEEK, BUT SEEK VENGEANCE!"

MUCH OF OUR CHURCH'S INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS REMAIN IN THE ABSTRACT; BUT YOU, MS. TREE, HAVE GIVEN OUR IDEAS REALITY! YOU HAVE LIVED WHAT WE BELIEVE!



I DON'T THINK SO...



"I KNOW SO," HAIN SAID INSISTENTLY. "YOU HAVE WASHED YOURSELF IN THE BLOOD OF YOUR ENEMIES."

"YOU HAVE THROWN OFF THE SHACKLES OF SOCIETY'S HYPOCRITICAL RULES AND YOU HAVE LIVED BY YOUR INSTINCTS ... YOU HAVE IMPOSED YOUR WILL ON THOSE YOU FIND CORRUPT, WHO YOU DEEM MORALLY WEAK!"

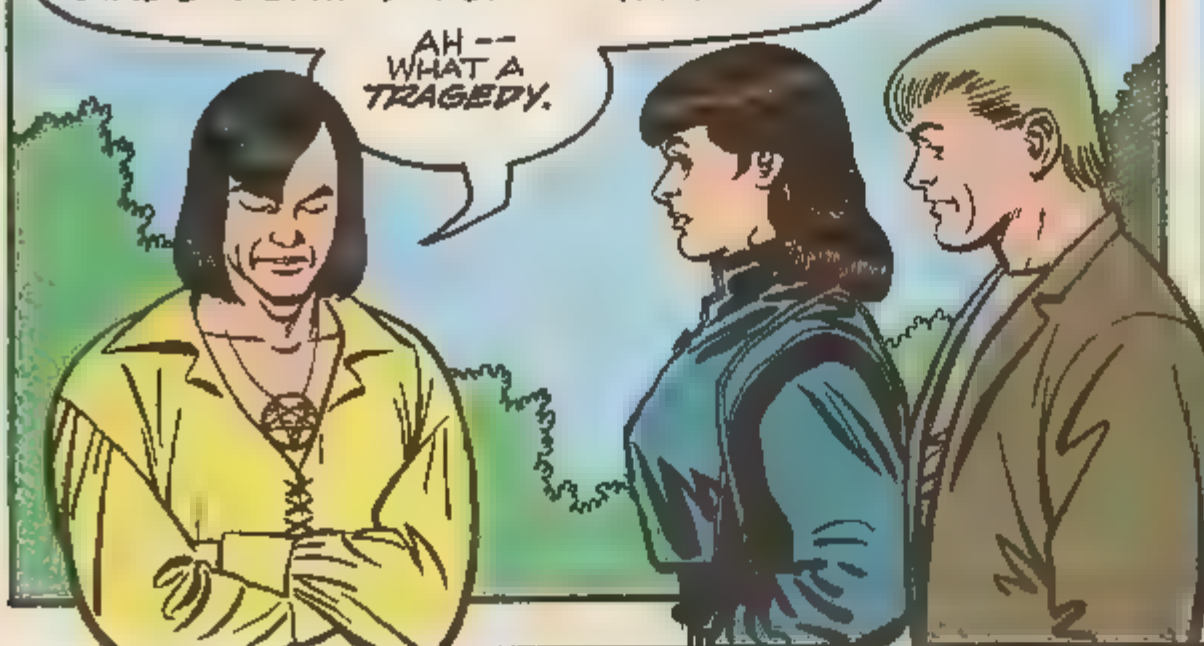


MS. TREE -- THE CHURCH OF SATANIC ILLUMINATION SALUTES YOU!

I HADN'T EXACTLY EXPECTED HAIN TO NAME ME SATANIST OF THE YEAR... BUT IT GAVE ME A GOOD WAY TO PLAY THIS. HAVING HAIN ON MY SIDE MIGHT BE USEFUL... UNLESS, OF COURSE, HAIN WAS PRETENDING TO BE ON MY SIDE... AND THIS WAS A SHAM MEANT TO THROW ME OFF COURSE.

YOU'RE INVESTIGATING THE MILLER GIRL'S DEATH? FOR HER PARENTS?

AH --
WHAT A
TRAGEDY.

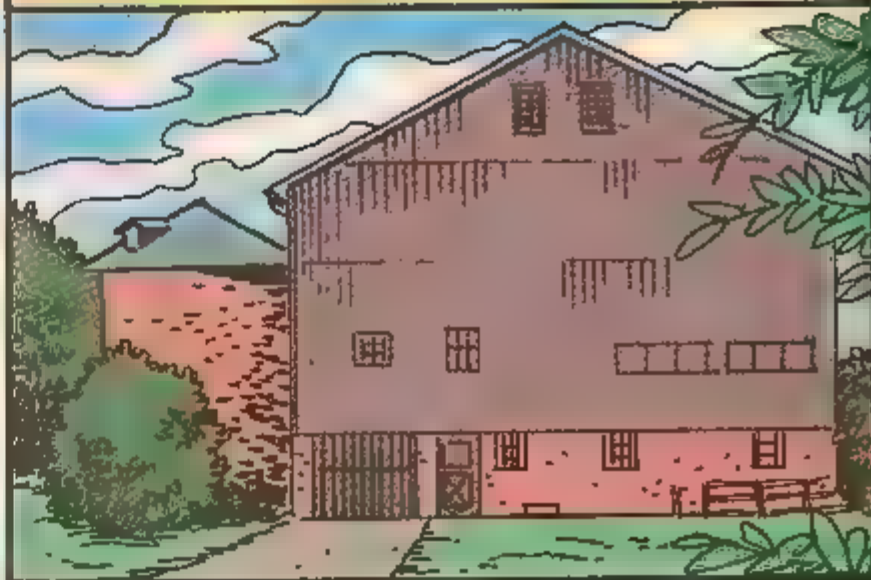


SHE WAS ONE OF YOURS, WASN'T SHE? SHE LIVED OUT HERE WITH YOU, WAS PART OF YOUR "FLOCK."



"YES," HAIN SAID. "BUT SHE CHOSE TO LEAVE US. WE ARE DEVOTED TO FREE WILL HERE, MS. TREE-- NO ONE IS PRESSURED TO STAY. SHE'D MOVED OUT FROM HER DORM ROOM. OH, I'D SAY A GOOD WEEK BEFORE HER MURDER."

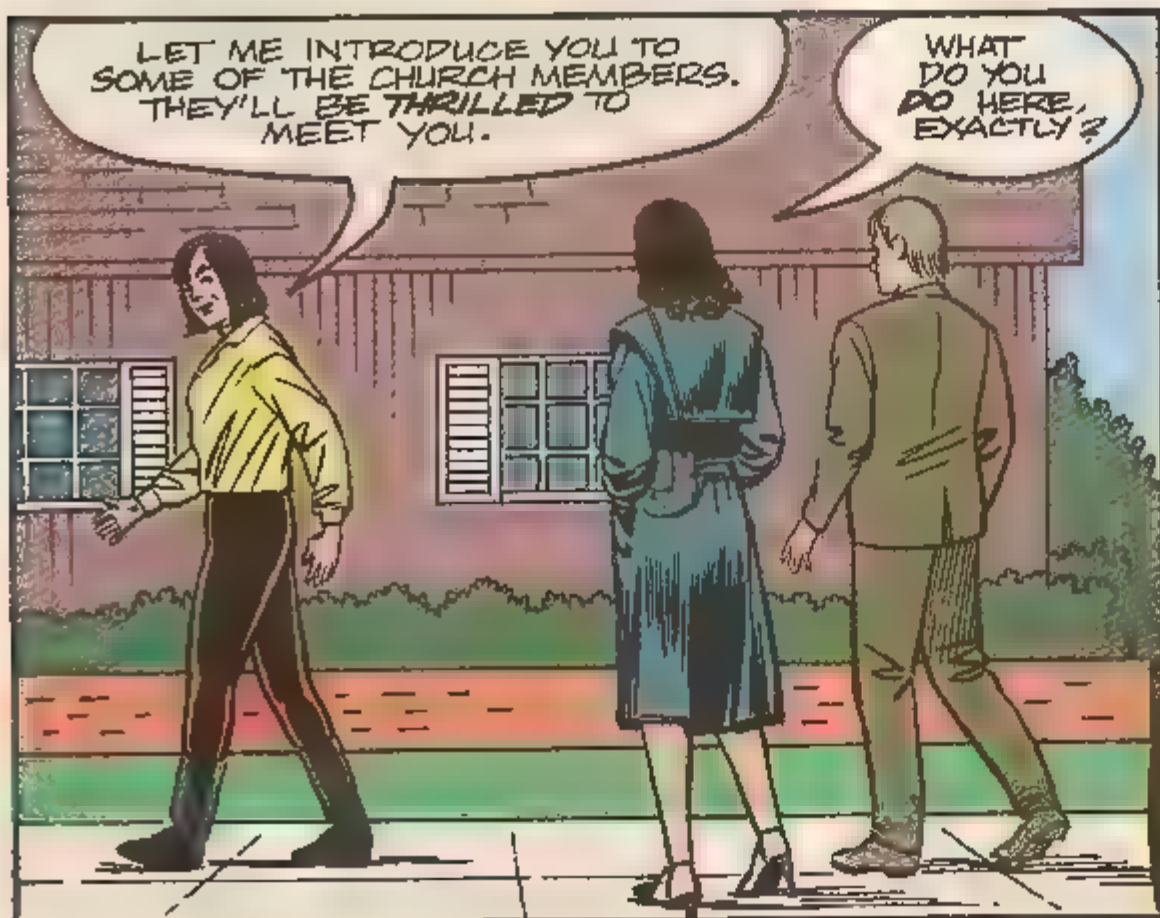
"DORM ROOM?" I ASKED. "YES," HAIN SAID, "THAT BARN OVER THERE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY REMODELED INTO A DORMITORY FOR OUR INITIATES, WITH THE LOWER AREA SERVING AS A GARAGE. THERE ARE IN EXCESS OF FIFTY OF US HERE, MS. TREE, LIVING IN PEACE AND HARMONY."



LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME OF THE CHURCH MEMBERS. THEY'LL BE THRILLED TO MEET YOU.

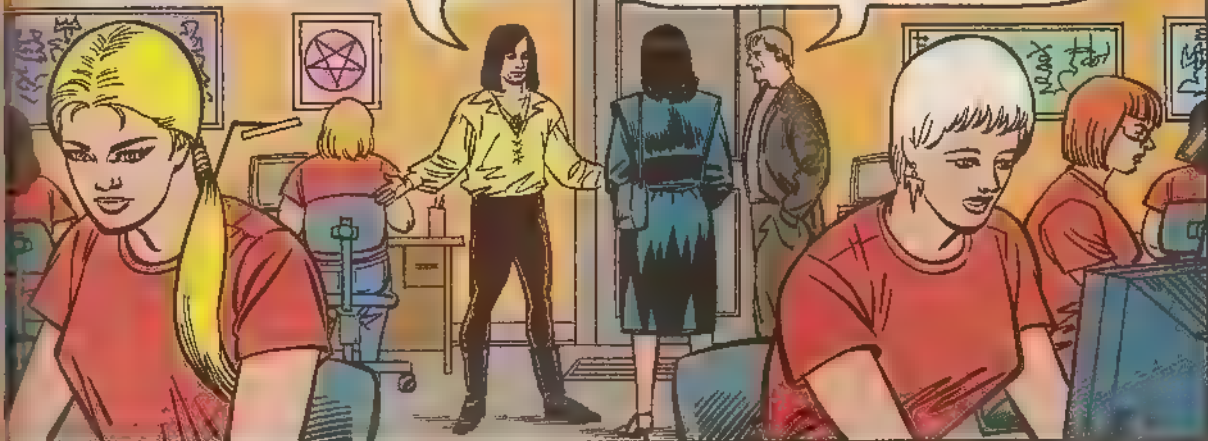
WHAT DO YOU DO HERE, EXACTLY?

WHAT ANY GOOD CHURCH DOES. WE SPREAD THE WORD....

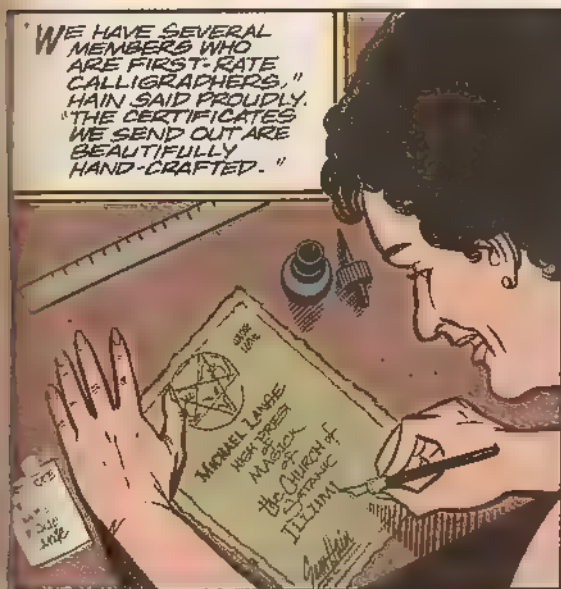


WE PRODUCE A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, MS. TREE -- WITH A CIRCULATION OF SIX THOUSAND. WE ALSO PROCESS DOZENS OF APPLICATIONS DAILY, FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP --

FOR TWENTY-FIVE BUCKS, YOU CAN MAIL ORDER A CERTIFICATE SAYING YOU'RE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF SATANIC ILLUMINATION, AND FOR ONE HUNDRED YOU CAN BE A HIGH PRIEST.



"WE HAVE SEVERAL MEMBERS WHO ARE FIRST-RATE CALLIGRAPHERS," HAIN SAID PROUDLY. "THE CERTIFICATES WE SEND OUT ARE BEAUTIFULLY HAND-CRAFTED."



I COME HERE EXPECTING HUMAN SACRIFICE AND FIND DESK-TOP PUBLISHING.

WELCOME TO THE '90s, MS. TREE.

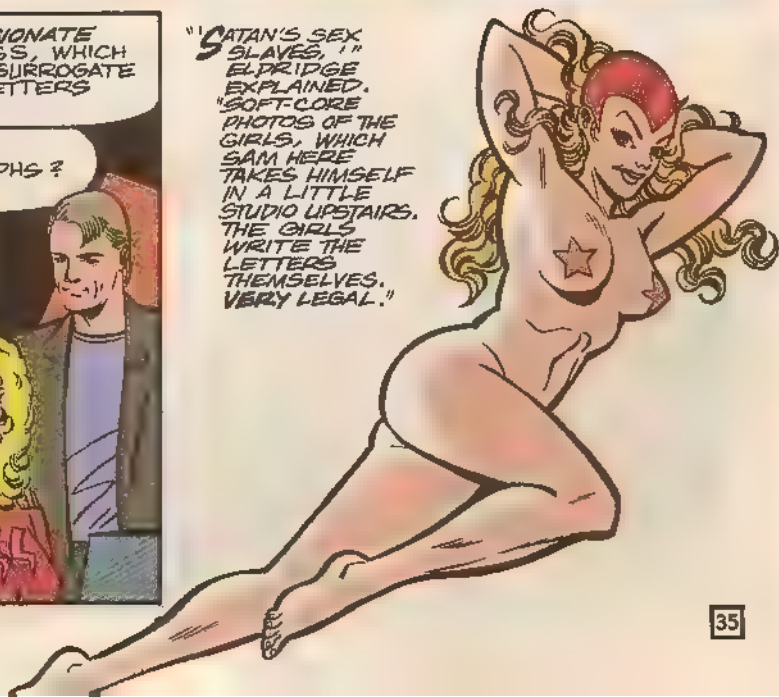


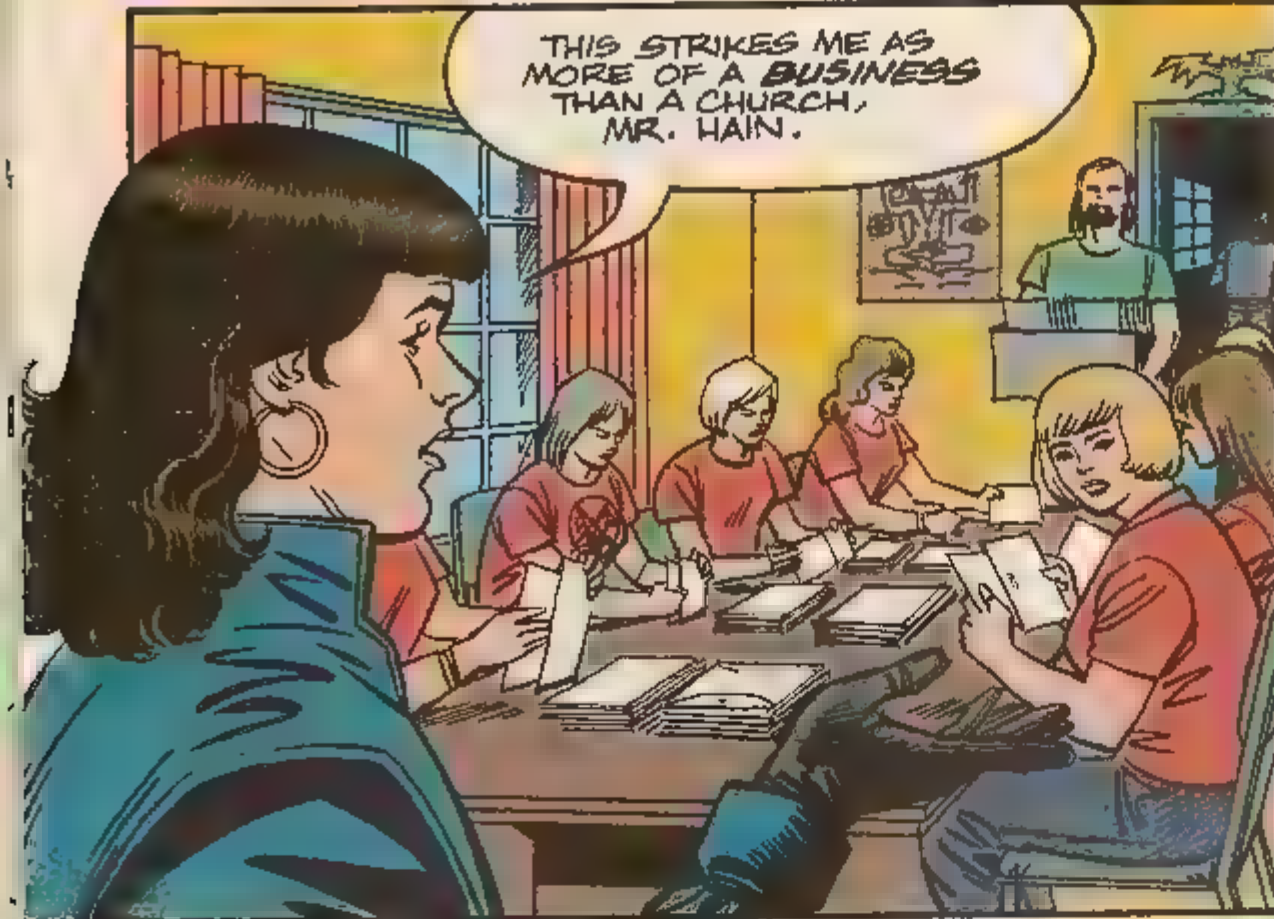
WE ALSO HAVE A COMPASSIONATE SERVICE KNOWN AS THE SSS, WHICH PROVIDES LONELY MEN WITH SURROGATE COMPANIONSHIP VIA LOVE LETTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHS.

SSS? PHOTOGRAPHS?



"SATAN'S SEX SLAVES," ELDRIDGE EXPLAINED. "SOFT-CORE PHOTOS OF THE GIRLS, WHICH SAM HERE TAKES HIMSELF IN A LITTLE STUDIO UPSTAIRS. THE GIRLS WRITE THE LETTERS THEMSELVES. VERY LEGAL."

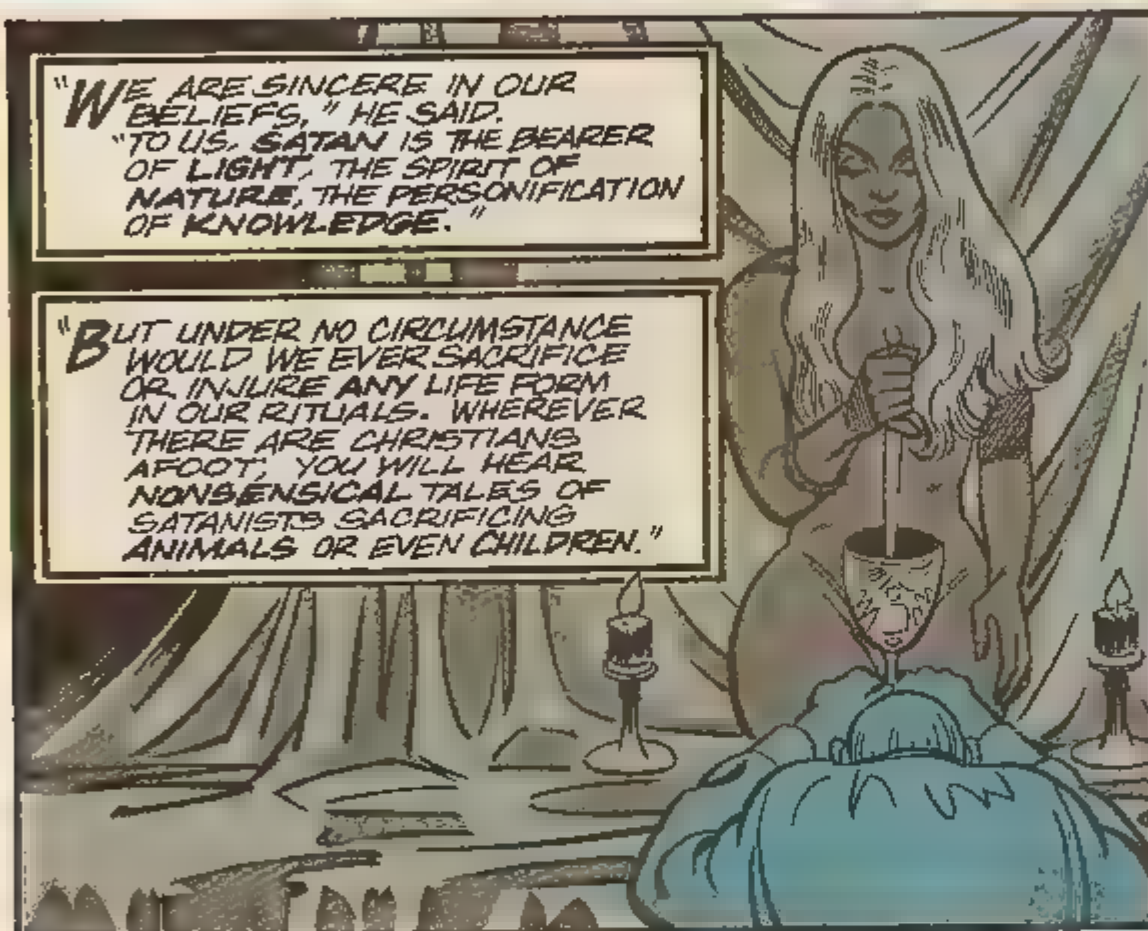




THIS STRIKES ME AS MORE OF A **BUSINESS** THAN A CHURCH, MR. HAIN.



"OH, IT'S A CHURCH. ALL RIGHT, MS. TREE. WE'RE JUST SELF-SUPPORTING. AND WE HAVE A **LITERAL** CHURCH... A DECONSECRATED CHAPEL ON THIS PROPERTY, WHICH WE USE FOR OUR CEREMONIES."



"WE ARE SINCERE IN OUR BELIEFS," HE SAID. "TO US, SATAN IS THE BEARER OF LIGHT, THE SPIRIT OF NATURE, THE PERSONIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE."

"BUT UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCE WOULD WE EVER SACRIFICE OR INJURE ANY LIFE FORM IN OUR RITUALS. WHEREVER THERE ARE CHRISTIANS AFOOT, YOU WILL HEAR NONSENSICAL TALES OF SATANISTS SACRIFICING ANIMALS OR EVEN CHILDREN."



WHAT ABOUT TALES OF **SEXUAL** RITUALS?



THE HUMAN ANIMAL CRAVES RITUAL... DOGMA, ... **MAGIC!** SEXUAL RITUALS FULFILL DESIRES; DESTRUCTIVE RITUALS FULFILL **ANGER** AND **HATE**... SOMETHING I KNOW YOU UNDERSTAND.

I'M NOT ONE OF YOU. I'M NOT LIKE YOU PEOPLE IN THE LEAST...

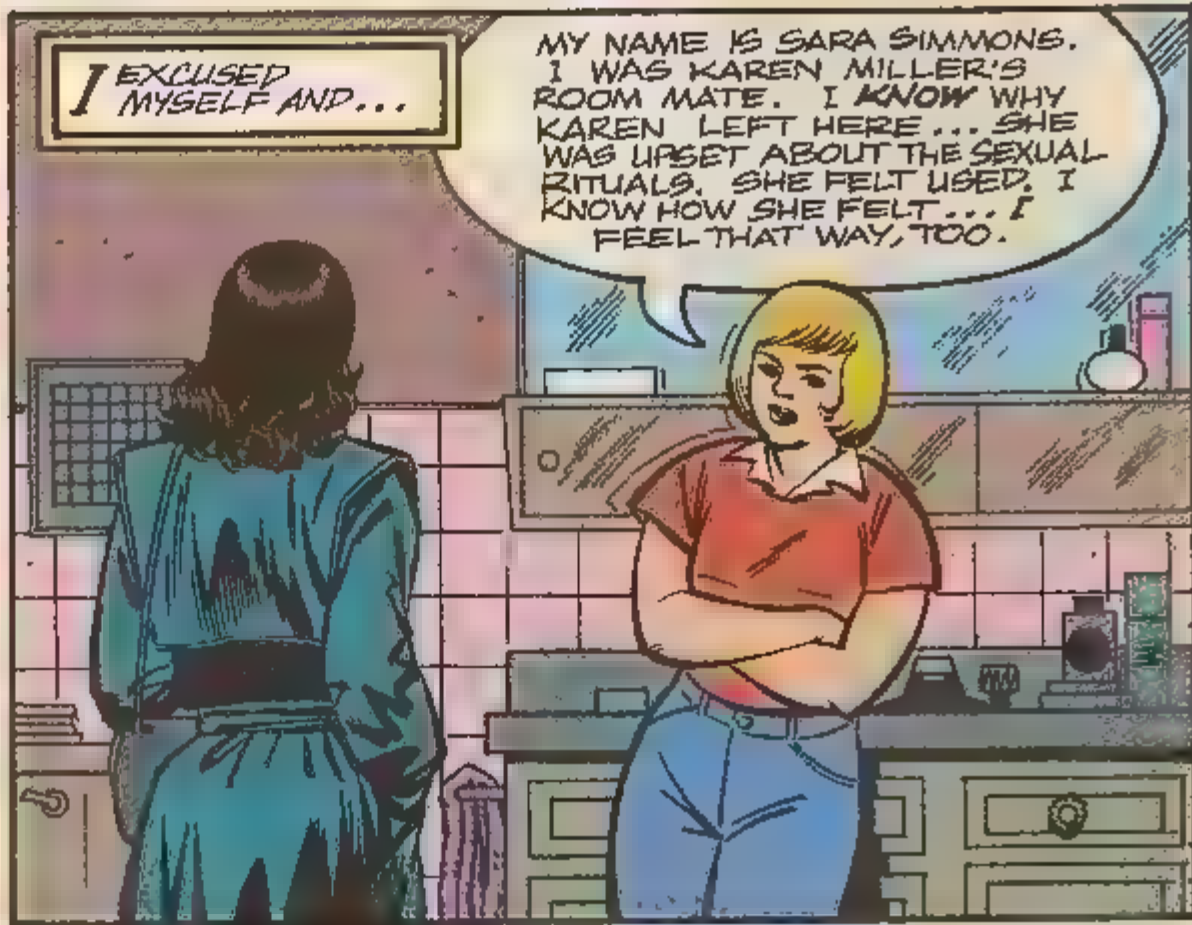
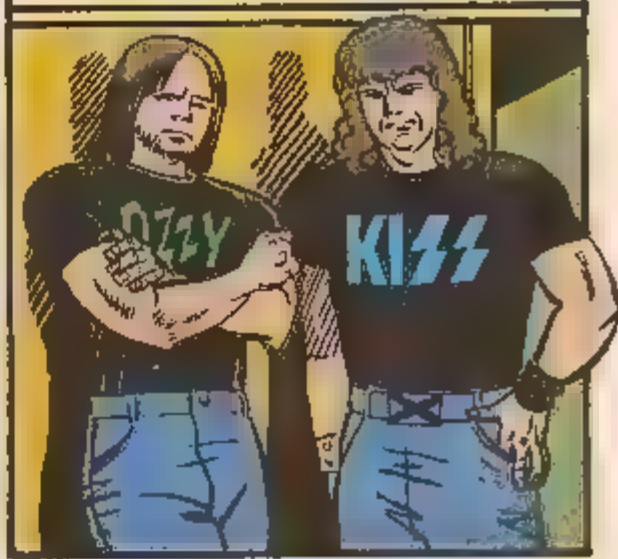
BUT YOU ARE. MIGHT I INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME OF THE MEMBERS?

I WENT ALONG WITH HIM... ALLOWING MYSELF TO BE THE HONORED GUEST OF THESE SICK SILLY SOULS (ON THEIR NEXT COFFEE BREAK).

HOW MANY OF THESE POOR GIRLS HAD BEEN MOLESTED BY THEIR FATHERS? HAD BEEN LURED INTO DRUGS BY A LOW-LIFE BOYFRIEND IN SCHOOL? WHAT SADNESSES HAD LED THEM TO THE HIGHWAY, AND, FINALLY INTO HAIN'S MANIPULATIVE SLEAZEBALL CULT?

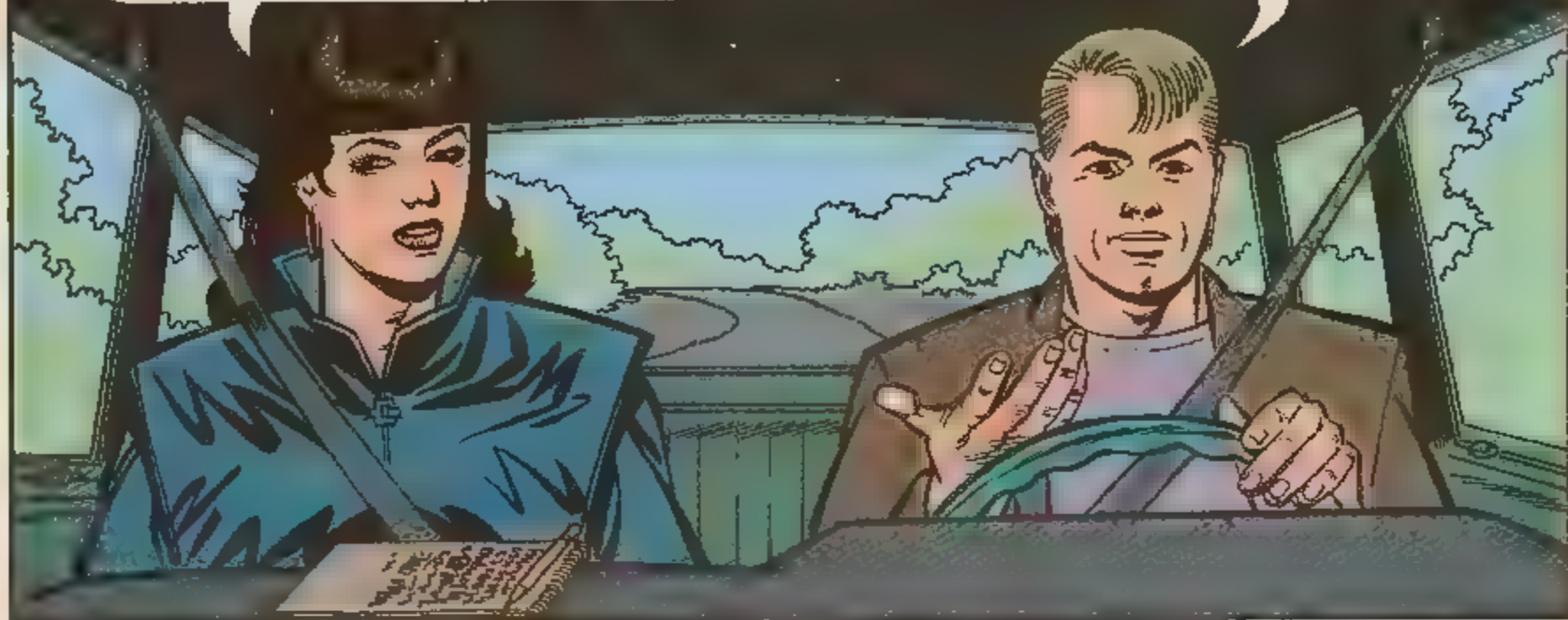


THE FEW MALES ON THE SCENE -- WHO DID NOT SEEM TO DO ANY WORK, HERE -- STAYED AWAY FROM ME. WAS THAT BECAUSE I MAY HAVE MET SOME OF THEM BEFORE? WAS ONE OF THE BROTHERN UPSTAIRS WITH HIS LEG IN A CAST, THANKS TO MY GIRLISH SWING OF A BASEBALL BAT?



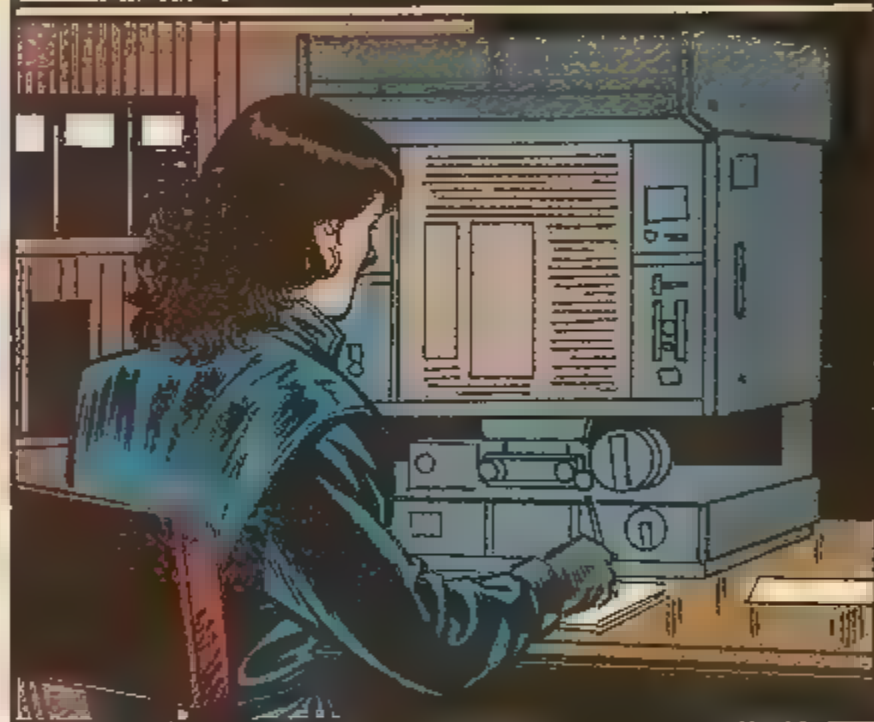
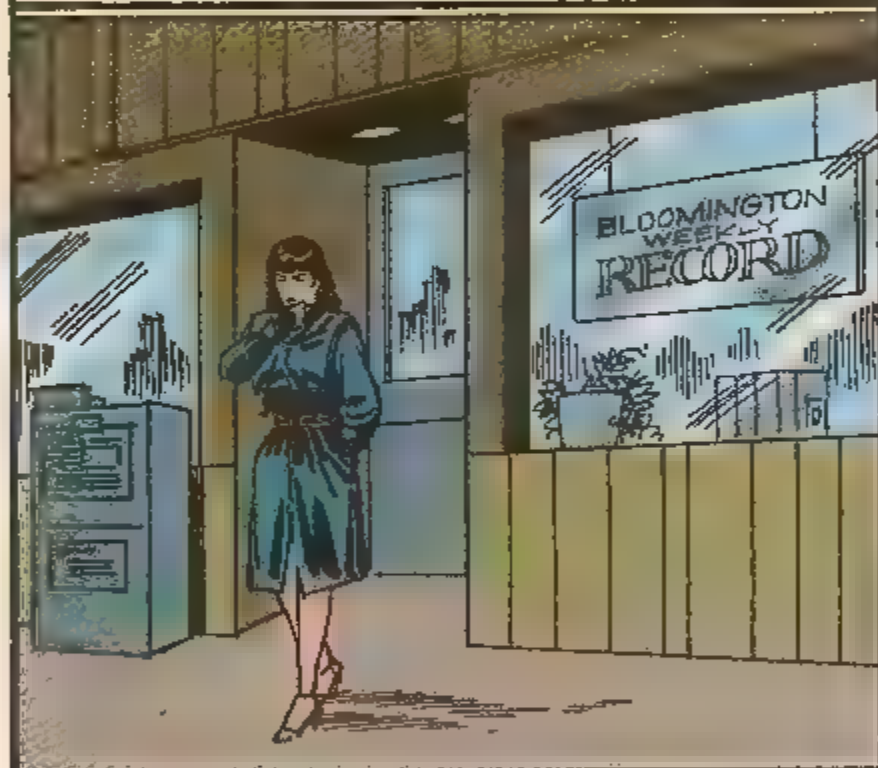
HAIN CLAIMS THAT THE INVERTED PENTAGRAM WRITTEN IN LIPSTICK ON THE MILLER GIRL'S BELLY MUST'VE BEEN THE WORK OF SOME LOCAL, TRYING TO BLAME THIS ON THE SATANISTS.

IT'S NOT THAT UNREASONABLE AN ASSUMPTION. THEY'RE PERFECT **SCAPEGOATS**. HAVE YOU RESEARCHED THE **PREVIOUS** MURDERS OF YOUNG WOMEN AT WILD CAT DEN?



"NO," I ADMITTED. "BUT THAT'S MY NEXT STEP." THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER WAS A WEEKLY, AND HAD NO MICROFILM RECORDS.

SO I DROVE TO THE NEARBY COUNTY SEAT, WHERE AT THE LIBRARY BACK ISSUES OF SEVERAL AREA PAPERS WERE AVAILABLE. ZEROING IN ON THE PREVIOUS TWO MURDERS WAS EASY ENOUGH.



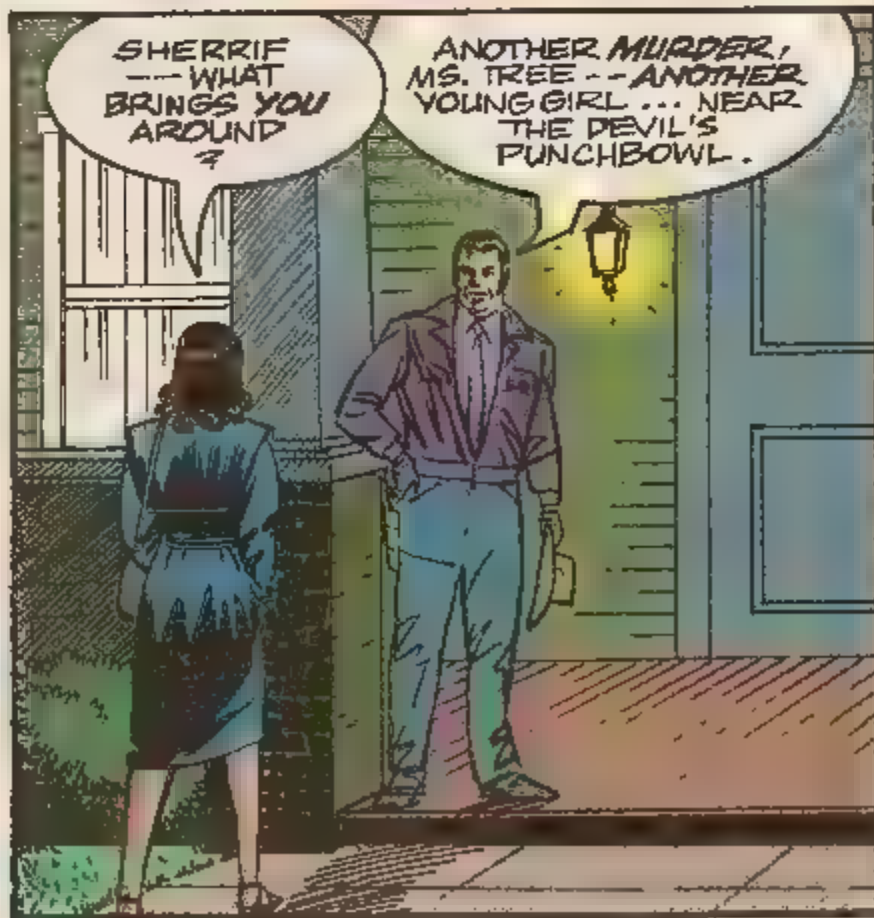
THE THREE MURDERS COULD HAVE BEEN THE WORK OF ONE PERSON, BUT WHAT SORT OF SERIAL KILLER SPREADS HIS CRIMES OUT OVER **DECADES**?



RUNNING A LITTLE LATE... HOPE SARA SIMMONS WAITED FOR ME...

SHERIFF --- WHAT BRINGS YOU AROUND?

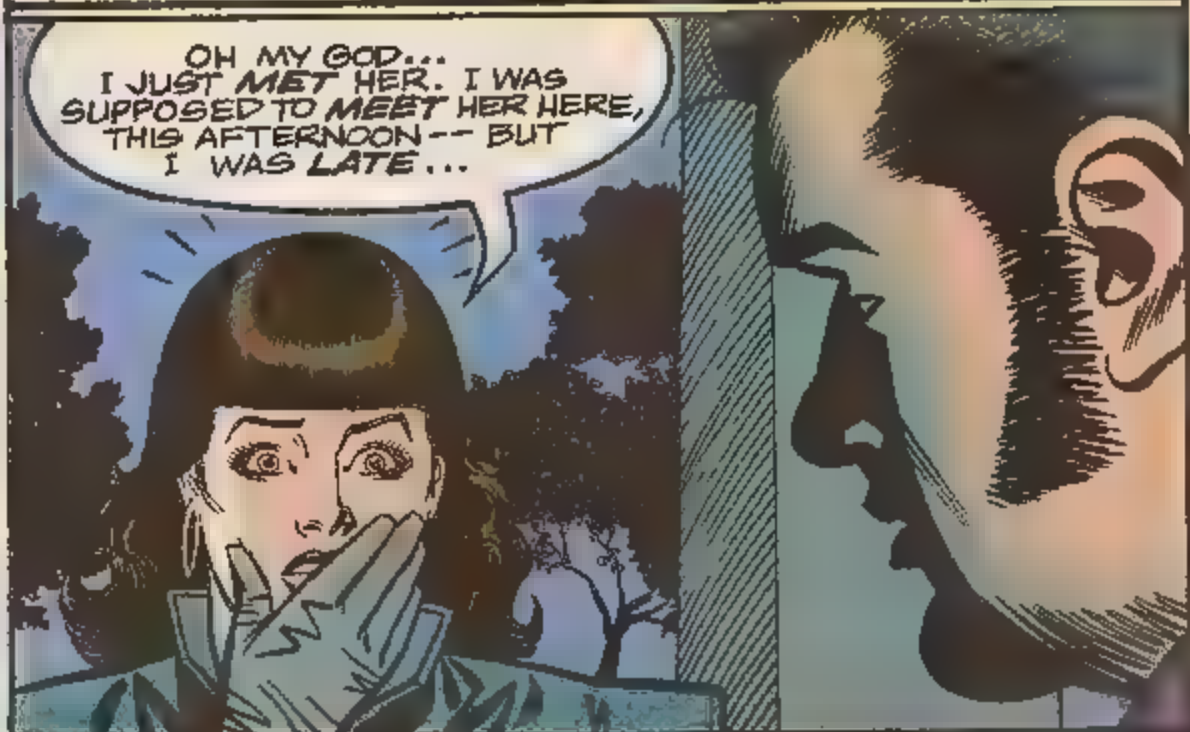
ANOTHER MURDER, MS. TREE -- ANOTHER YOUNG GIRL ... NEAR THE DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL.



"ONE OF THOSE
SATANIST GIRLS,"
SHERIFF THOMAS SAID.
"SARA SIMMONS..."



HE EXPLAINED THAT THE PARK RANGER HAD STUMBLED
OVER THE BODY AT DUSK, WHICH WAS A "LUCKY BREAK"
BECAUSE IT COULD HAVE GONE UNDISCOVERED FOR
DAYS. THE MEDICAL EXAMINER SAID THE GIRL HAD
BEEN KILLED WITHIN THE LAST FEW HOURS...



OH MY GOD...
I JUST MET HER. I WAS
SUPPOSED TO MEET HER HERE,
THIS AFTERNOON -- BUT
I WAS LATE...

SHE HAD SOMETHING
SHE WANTED TO TELL ME
ABOUT THE OTHER
GIRL WHO WAS
KILLED...

YOU THINK SHE
WAS GOING TO BLOW
THE WHISTLE ON
THAT BASTARD
HAIN?

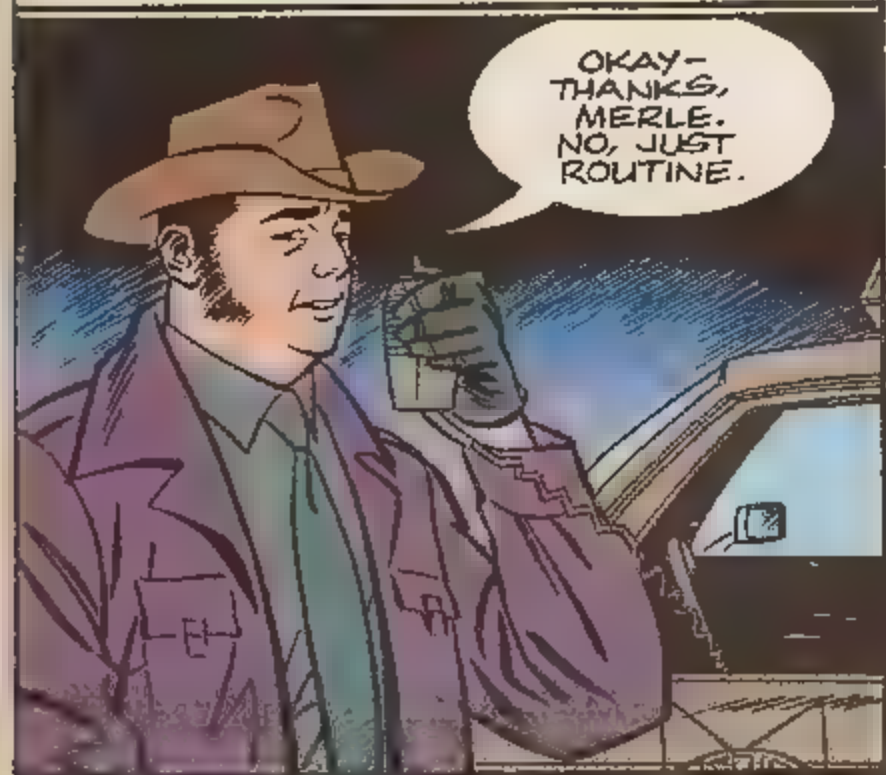
AND HER CULTIST "FRIENDS"
MUST HAVE **TURNED** ON
HER, WHEN THEY
FOUND OUT...

MAYBE.
SHERIFF, CAN YOU RUN
A CHECK ON SOMETHING
FOR ME, QUICKLY?



I TOLD HIM ABOUT MY RUN-IN LAST
NIGHT AT THE NORTHSIDE TAP WITH
THOSE TWO CLOWNS IN HEAVY-METAL
T-SHIRTS AND HOODS.

OKAY-
THANKS,
MERLE.
NO, JUST
ROUTINE.

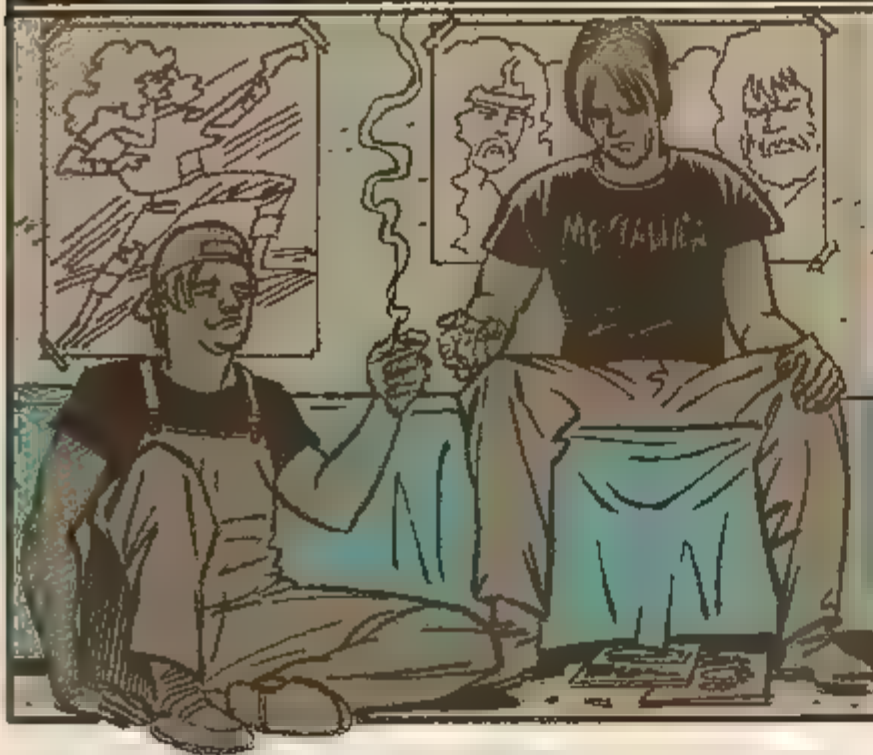


EMERGENCY ROOM OVER AT COUNTY
GENERAL **DID** HAVE A GUY COME IN WITH
A BUSTED LEG. HE'S A MAINTENANCE
MAN, OVER IN PLAINVILLE --
NAME'S FRED BRICKER.

LOCAL BOY.
UNLIKELY
SATANIST.



"NOT NECESSARILY," SHERIFF THOMAS SAID. "SOME OF THE LOCAL KIDS WHO ARE INTO THAT HEAVY-METAL CRAP AND DRUGS AND SO ON, THEY MIGHT BE REAL LIKELY DEVIL-WORSHIP CANDIDATES."



BUT I WILL CHECK HIM OUT FOR YOU...

I APPRECIATE THAT. BY THE WAY, WHAT'S YOUR OPINION OF THIS REPORTER -- RICH ELDRIDGE?

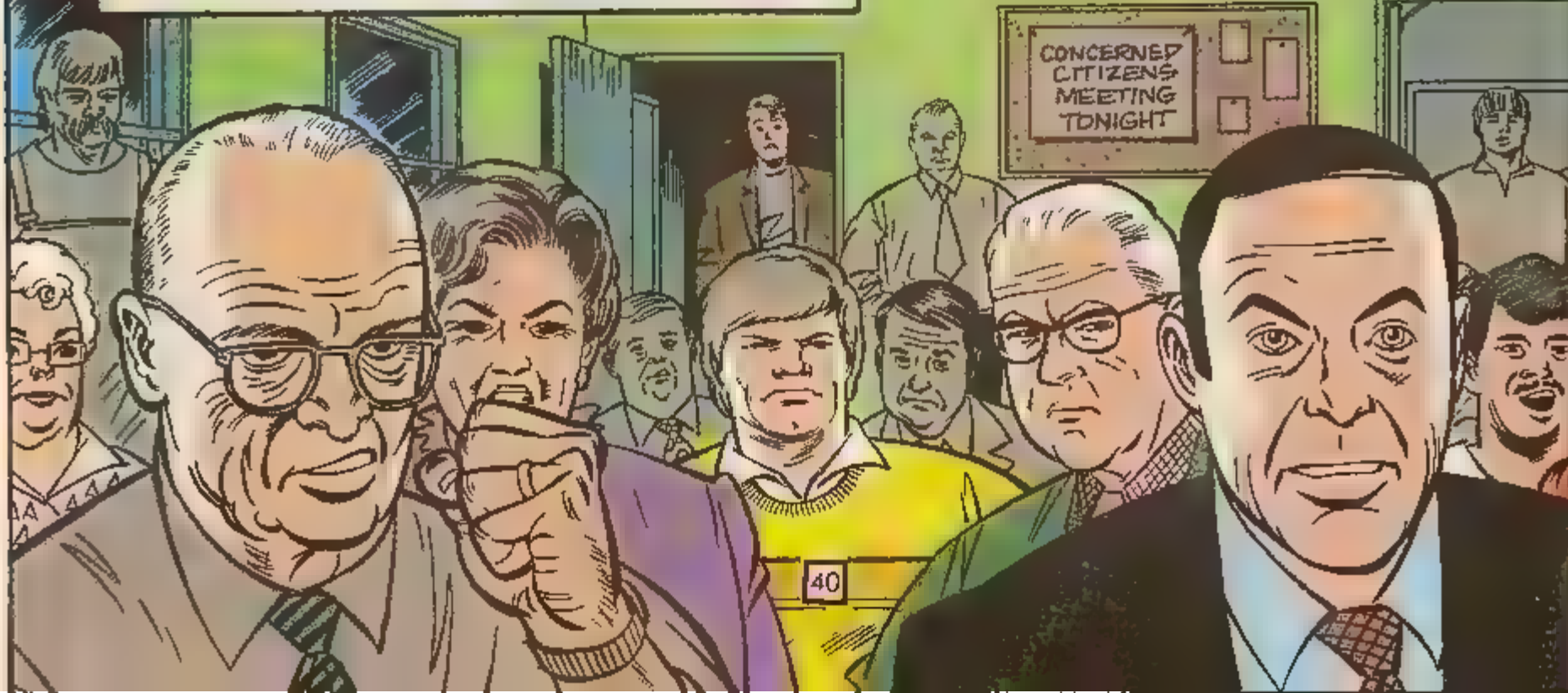


IS HE BACK IN TOWN?

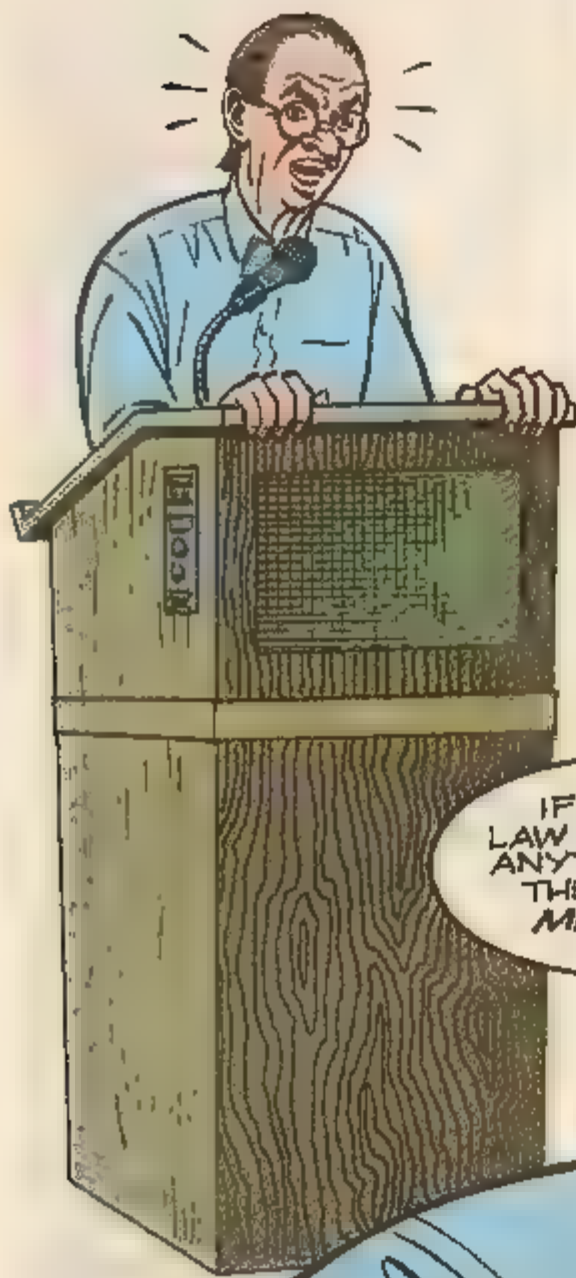
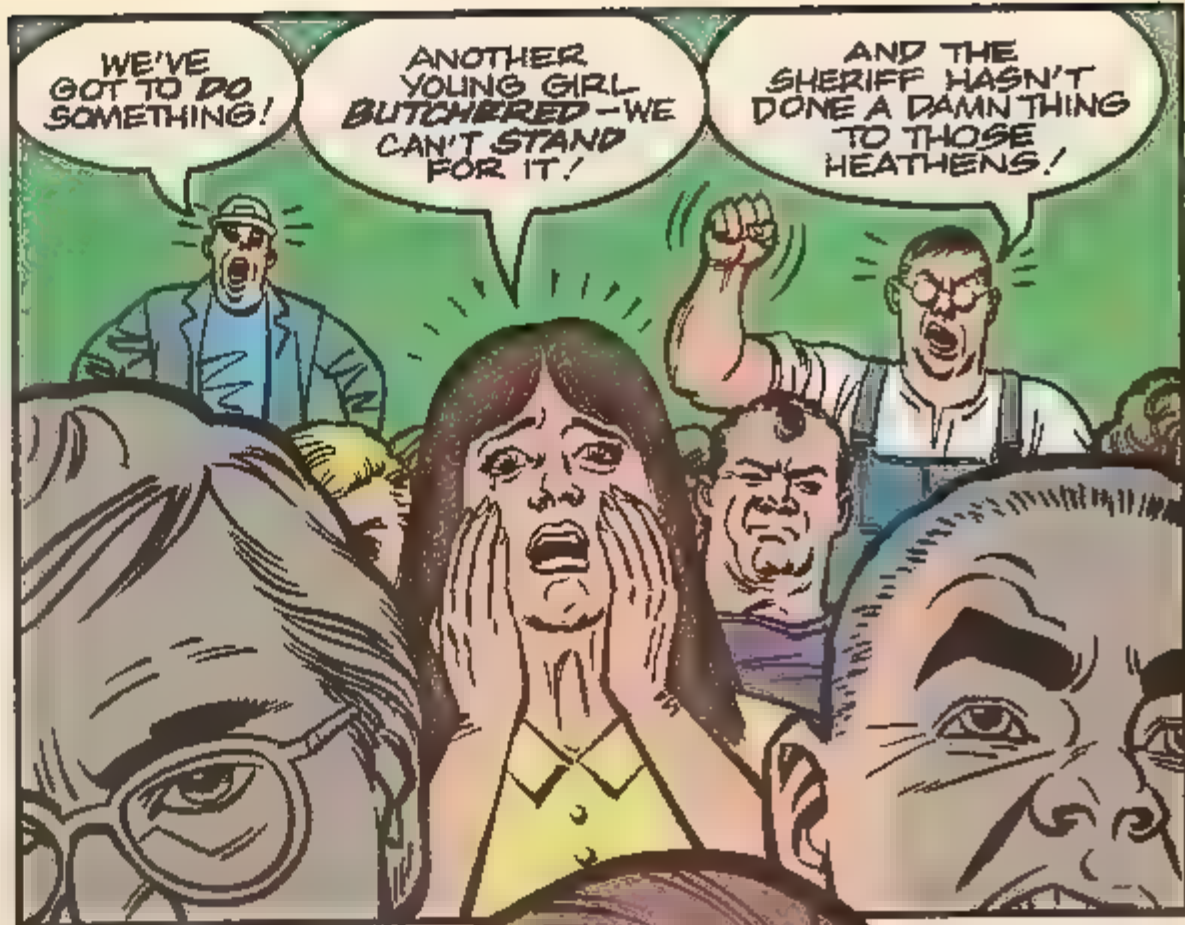
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "BACK" IN TOWN?



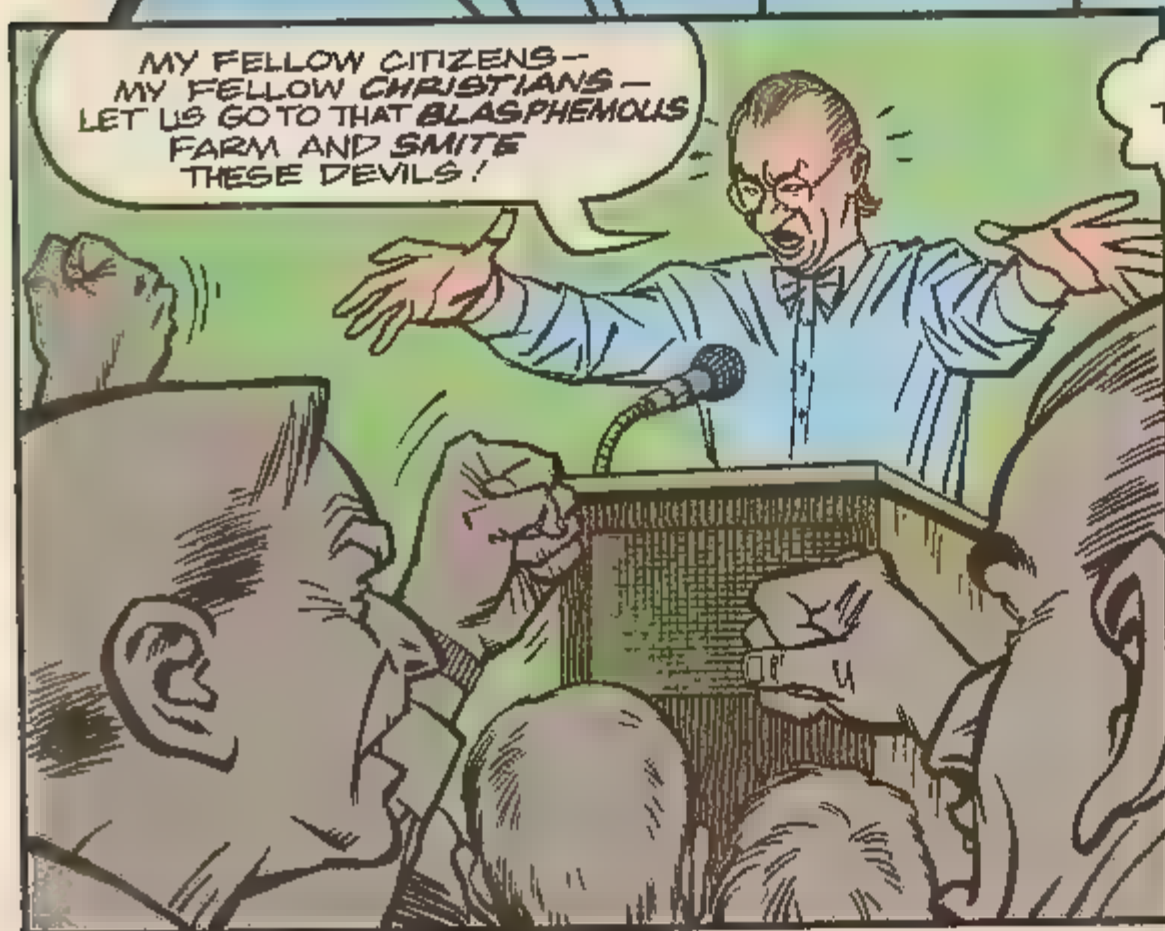
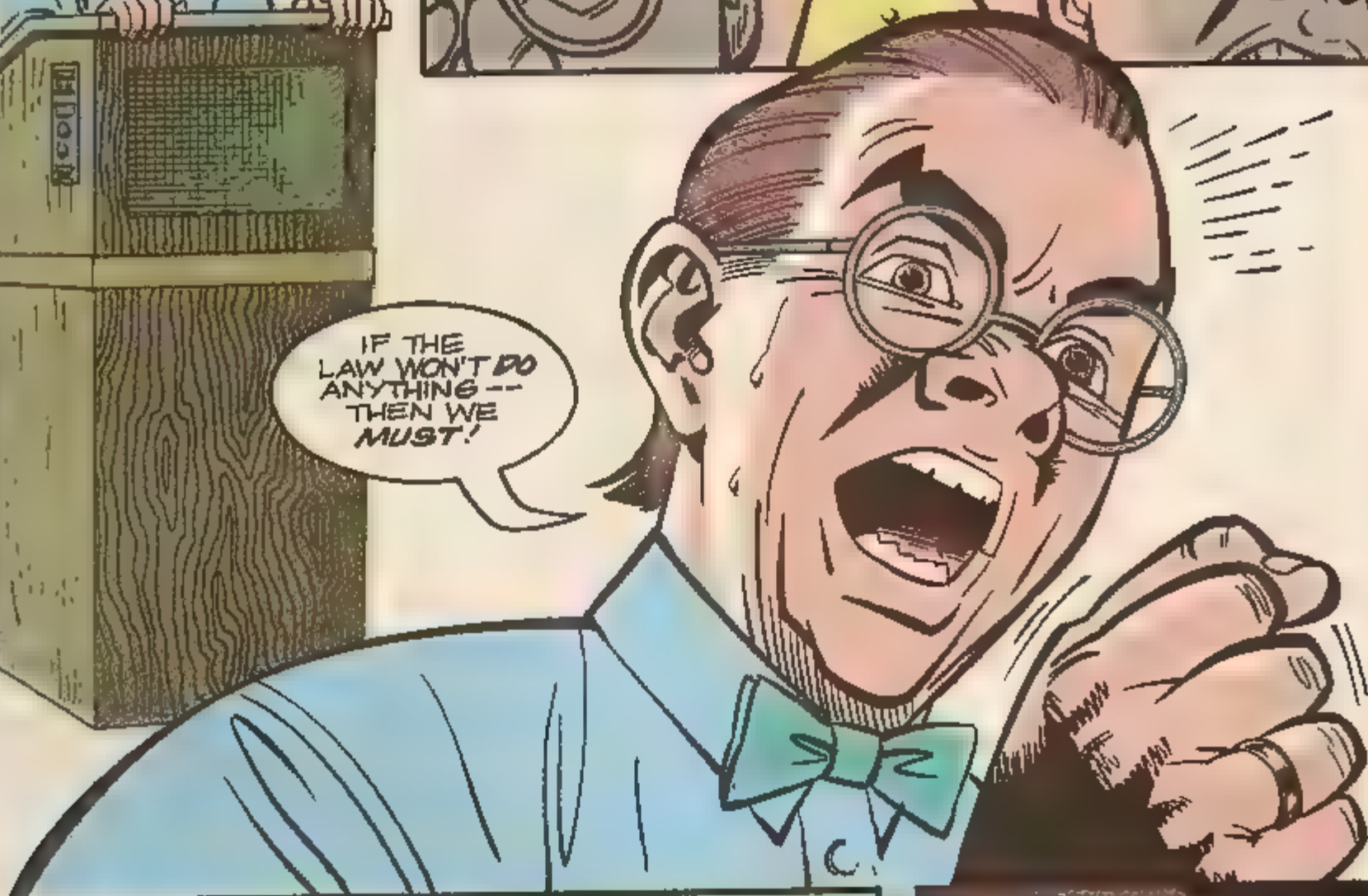
"ALL I KNOW IS, ELDRIDGE WAS DOING AN IN-DEPTH ARTICLE ON HAIN'S GROUP, ABOUT THE TIME THE MILLER GIRL WAS KILLED. WE QUESTIONED HIM, 'CAUSE HE'D HAD SOME CONTACT WITH HER. BUT NOTHING CAME OF IT."



WE'VE BEEN COMPLACENT
TOO LONG! WE'RE GOOD
CHRISTIANS IN A
GOOD CHRISTIAN TOWN--
HOW CAN WE ALLOW
THESE PAGAN BLOOD
RITUALS TO CONTINUE?



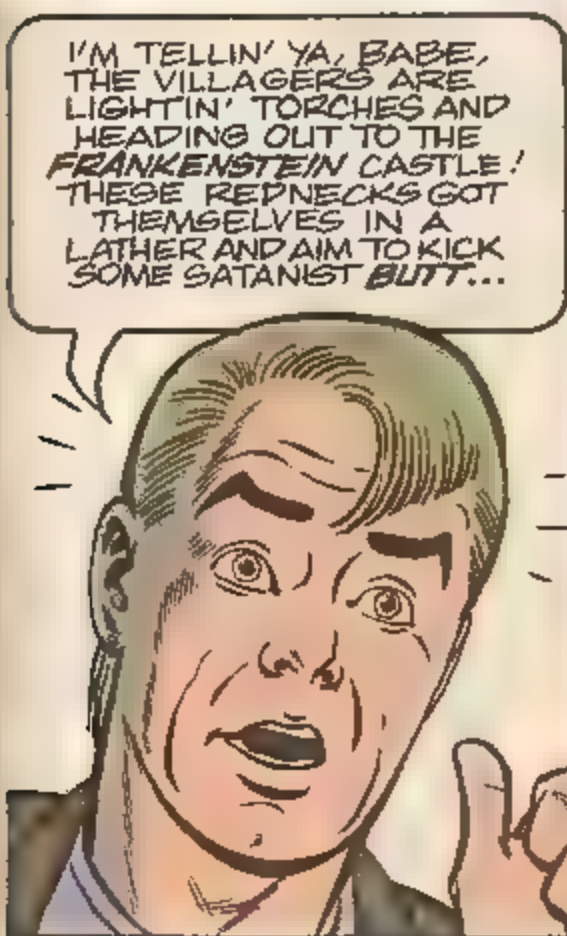
IF THE
LAW WON'T DO
ANYTHING ---
THEN WE
MUST!



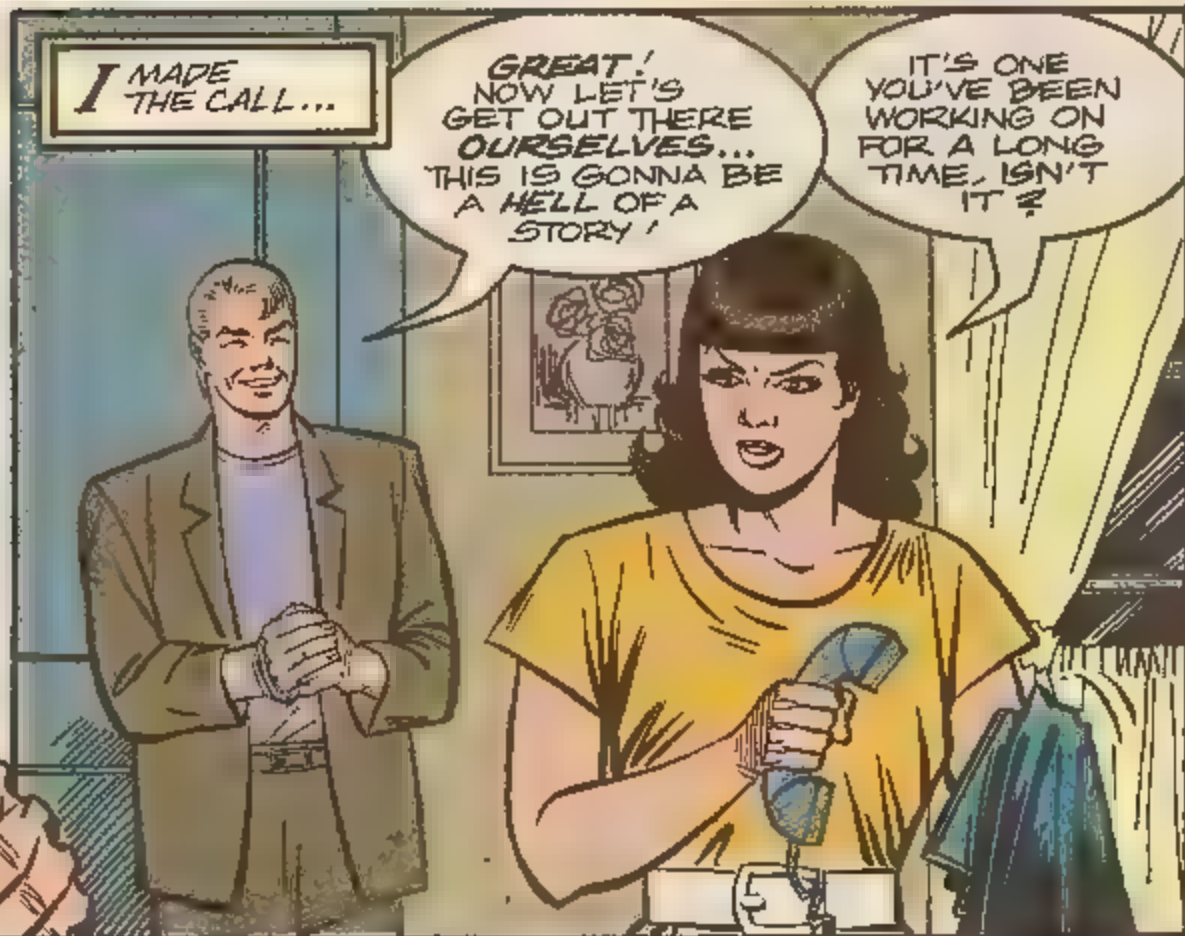


MS. TREE -- CALL THE COPS,
IF THIS BURG HAS ANY! CALL THAT
SHERIFF! SOMETHING REALLY
WEIRD IS COMIN' DOWN!

WHAT
ARE
YOU---



I'M TELLIN' YA, BABE,
THE VILLAGERS ARE
LIGHTIN' TORCHES AND
HEADING OUT TO THE
FRANKENSTEIN CASTLE!
THESE REDNECKS GOT
THEMSELVES IN A
LATHER AND AIM TO KICK
SOME SATANIST BUTT...



I MADE
THE CALL...

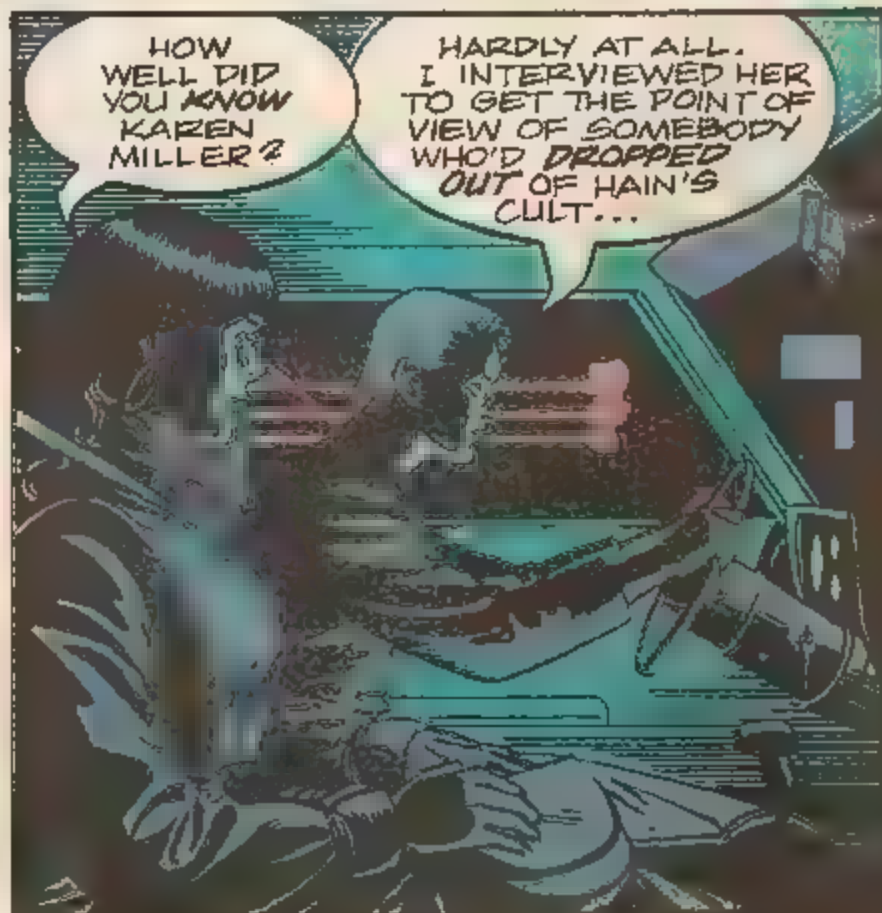
GREAT!
NOW LET'S
GET OUT THERE
OURSELVES...
THIS IS GONNA BE
A HELL OF A
STORY!

IT'S ONE
YOU'VE BEEN
WORKING ON
FOR A LONG
TIME, ISN'T
IT?



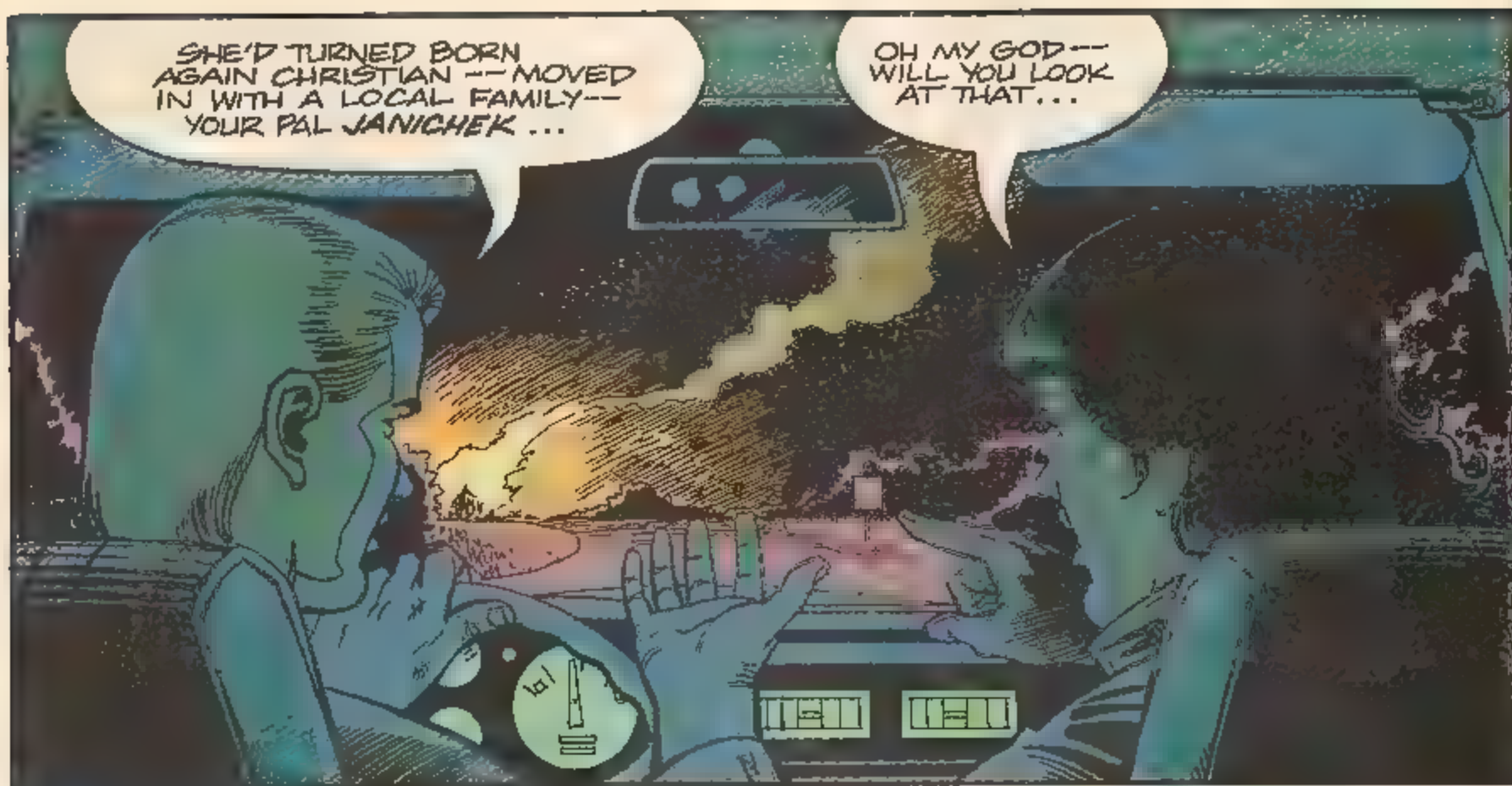
YOU WERE
HERE BEFORE
-- YOU KNEW
THE MILLER
GIRL!

YEAH -- SO WHAT?
I USUALLY DO AN
EXTENSIVE FOLLOW-UP
ON ANY MAJOR
INVESTIGATIVE
PIECE...



HOW
WELL DID
YOU KNOW
KAREN
MILLER?

HARDLY AT ALL.
I INTERVIEWED HER
TO GET THE POINT OF
VIEW OF SOMEBODY
WHO'D DROPPED
OUT OF HAIN'S
CULT...



SHE'D TURNED BORN
AGAIN CHRISTIAN -- MOVED
IN WITH A LOCAL FAMILY--
YOUR PAL JANICHEK ...

OH MY GOD--
WILL YOU LOOK
AT THAT...

"PULL OVER!" I SAID.
'WE'LL APPROACH
ON FOOT..."



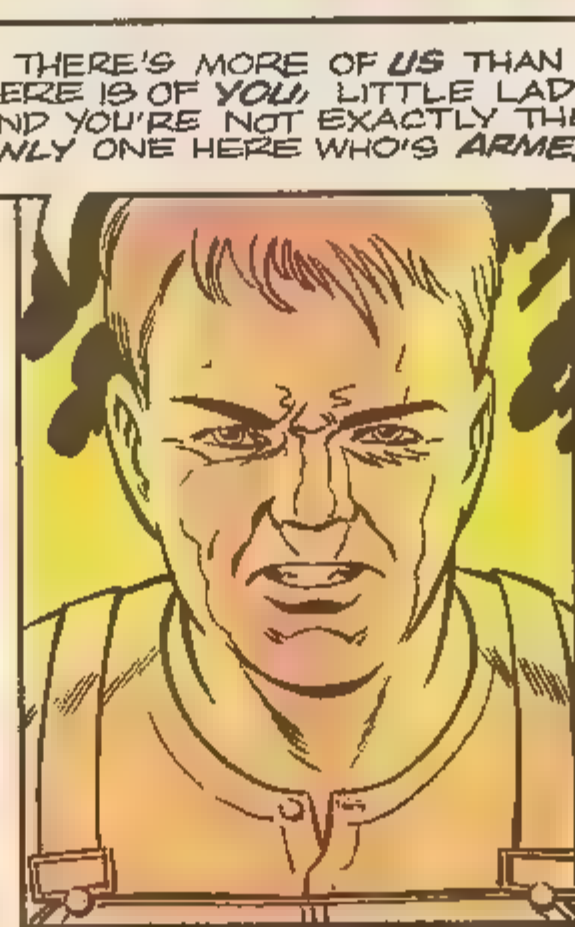
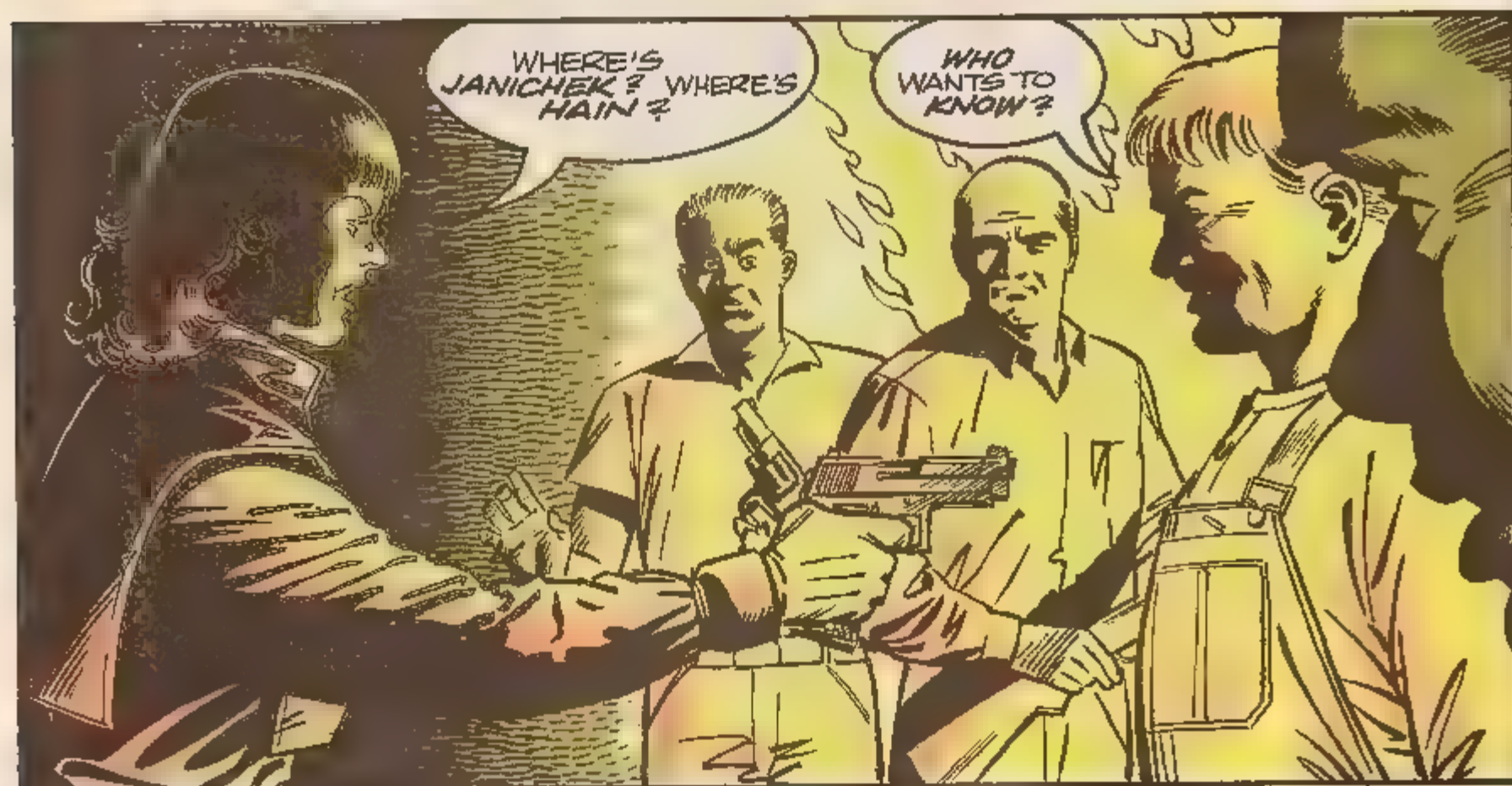
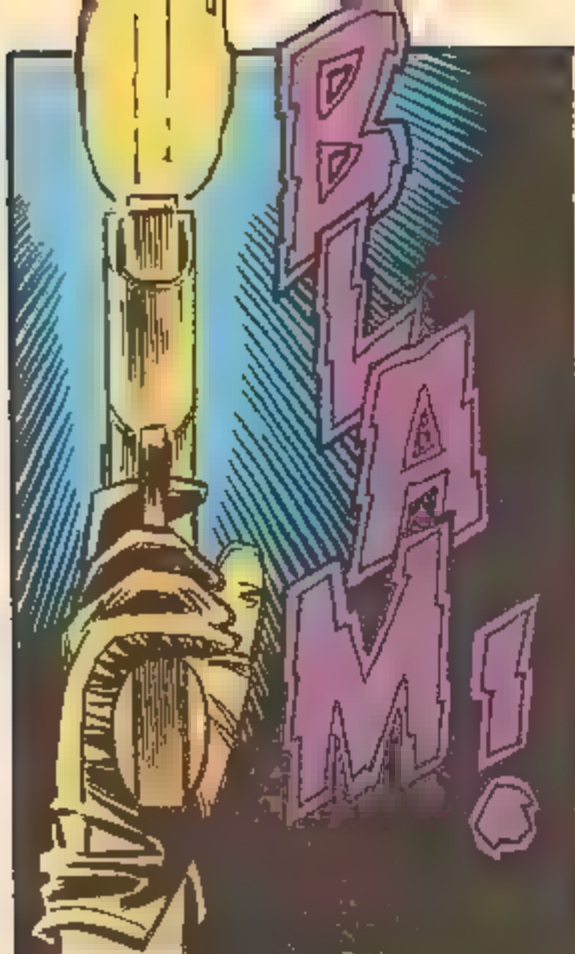
PRAISE
JESUS!

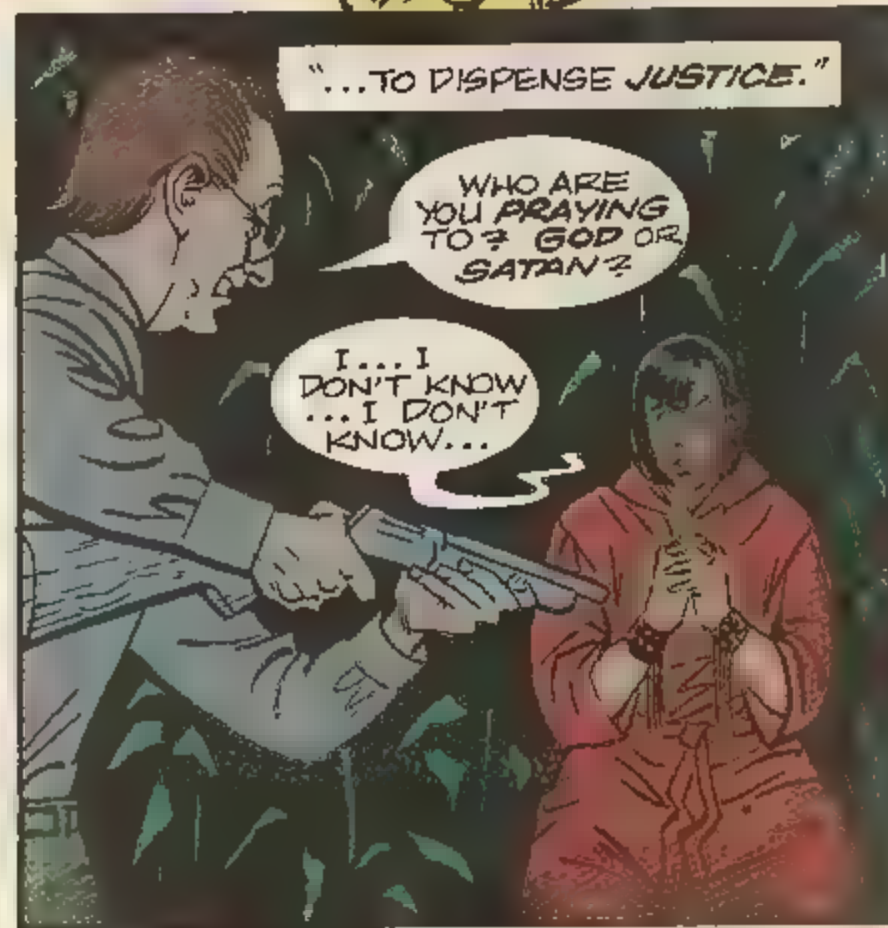
REPENT,
SINNERS!

HALLELUJAH!

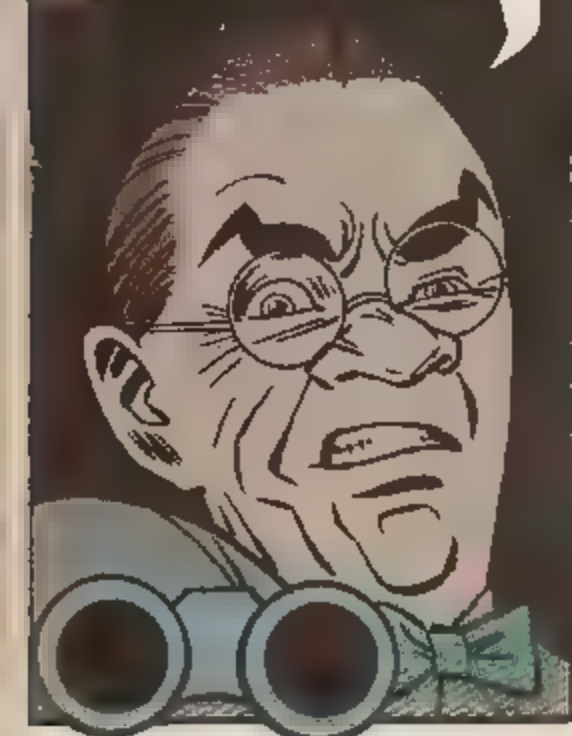
PRAISE
GOD!







YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE THE COURAGE OF YOUR CONVICTIONS... YOU DISGUST ME! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE DIVINE DICHOTOMY...



THE... WHAT?



GOOD AND EVIL EXIST IN US ALL, HAIN-- MOST MEN ARE TORN BY THE CONFLICT... BUT MANY YEARS AGO, WHEN I WAS A YOUNG MAN, RAGING WITH FEELINGS I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, IT CAME TO ME...



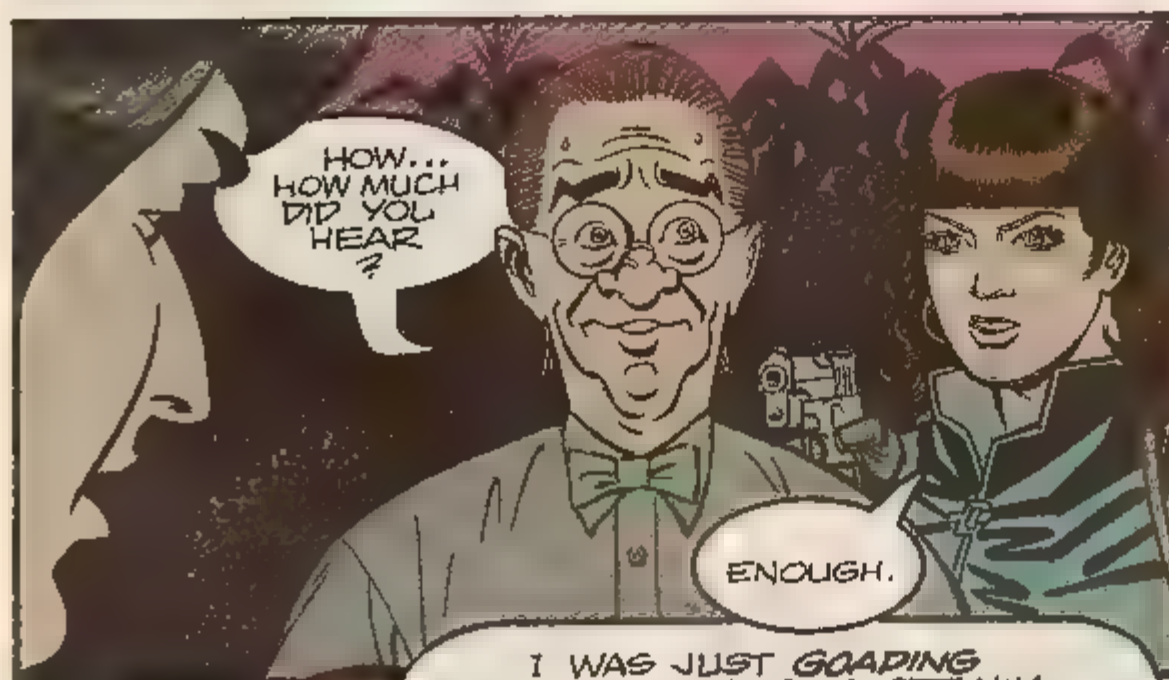
"GOD NOT ONLY EXPECTS US TO SLIP FROM THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW, HE WANTS US TO ... CHRIST WASHED AWAY OUR SINS WITH HIS BLOOD, AND IF WE FAIL TO EVER SIN, HIS SACRIFICE WAS FOR NOTHING!"



YOU ARE NUTS, PAL!

TO DESERVE HIS FORGIVENESS, I HAVE LEARNED TO SAVOR EVIL ...

SAVOR THIS, YOU SICK SON OF A BITCH.

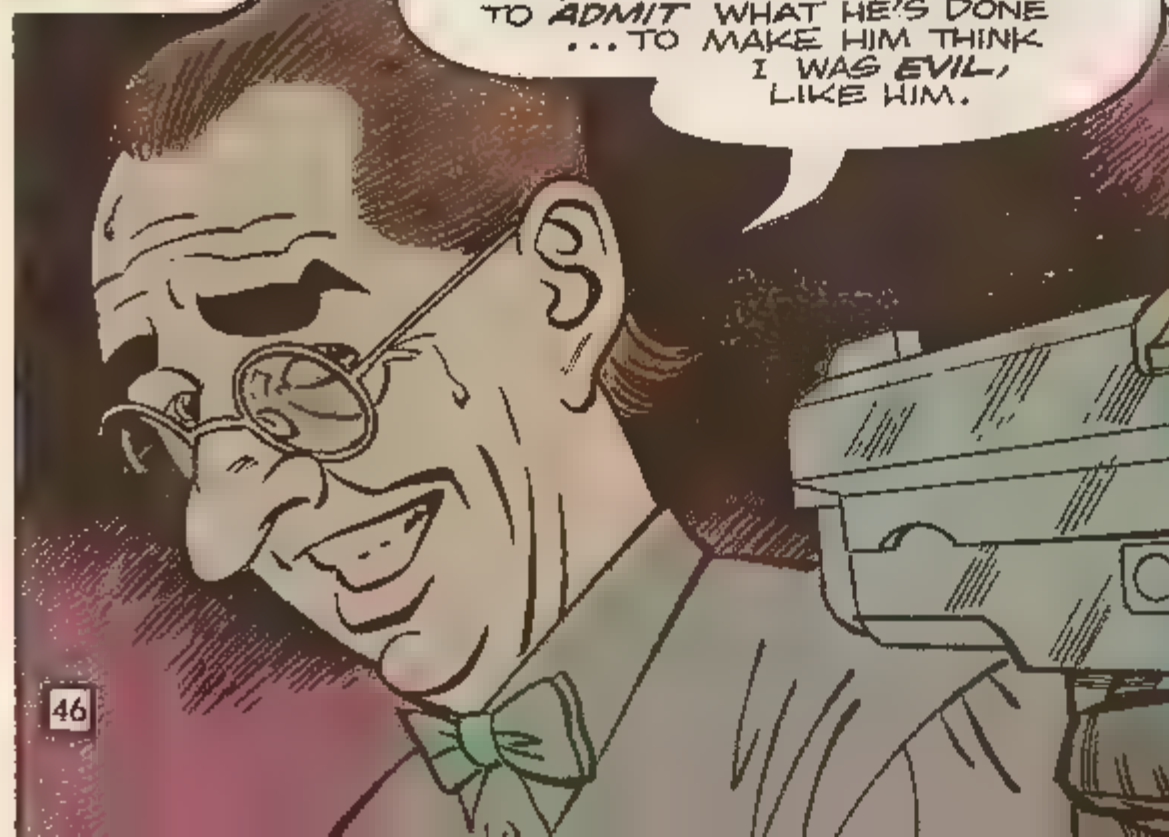


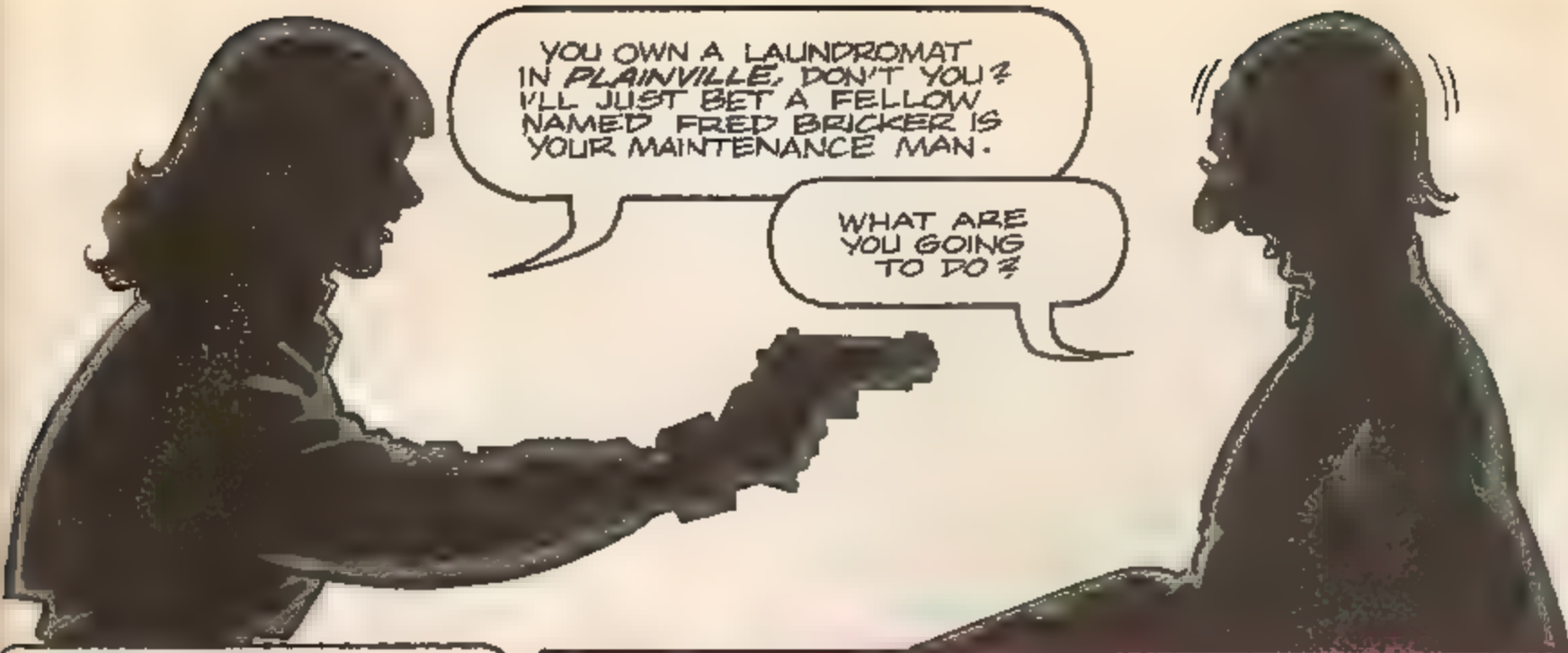
HOW... HOW MUCH DID YOU HEAR?

ENOUGH.

I WAS JUST GOADING HAIN... TRYING TO GET HIM TO ADMIT WHAT HE'S DONE ... TO MAKE HIM THINK I WAS EVIL, LIKE HIM.

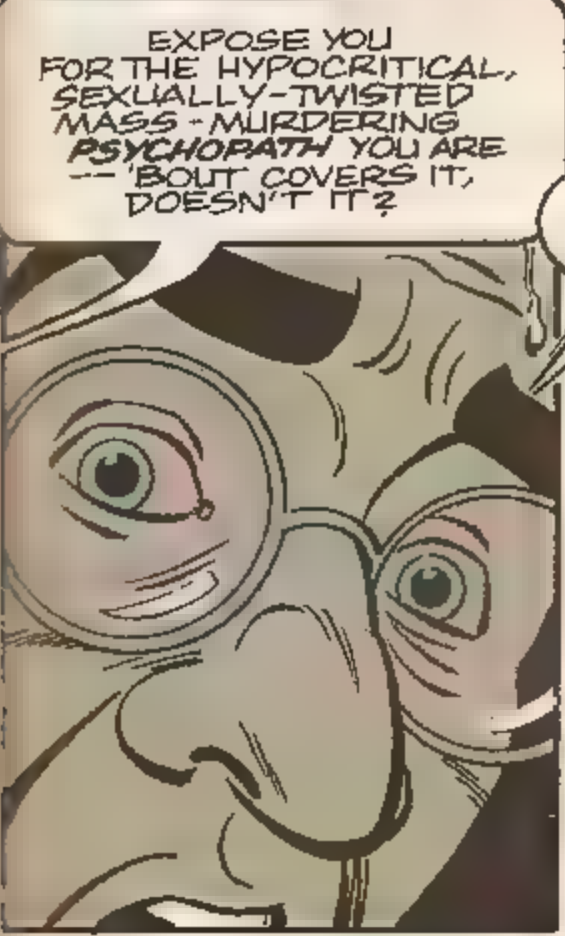
SHUT UP, I'D HAVE BEEN ON TO YOU SOONER, IF YOU HADN'T HIRED THOSE COUNTRY BOYS TO PUT ON HOODS AND HEAVY-METAL T-SHIRTS AND PLAY SATANIST ATTACK SQUAD.





YOU OWN A LAUNDROMAT IN PLAINVILLE, DON'T YOU? I'LL JUST BET A FELLOW NAMED FRED BRICKER IS YOUR MAINTENANCE MAN.

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?



EXPOSE YOU FOR THE HYPOCRITICAL, SEXUALLY-TWISTED MASS-MURDERING PSYCHOPATH YOU ARE -- 'BOLT' COVERS IT, DOESN'T IT?

NO... NO...

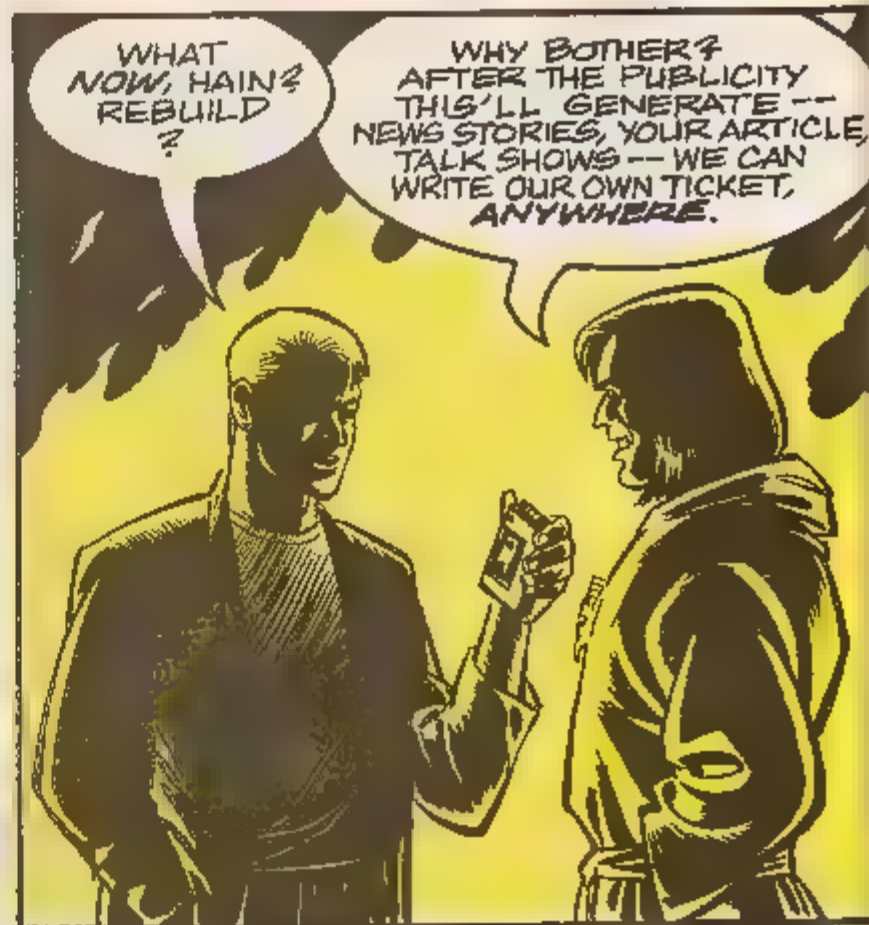




HELL...

HE EMBRACED
THE DICHOTOMY
OF EVIL, ALL RIGHT
... BOTH
BARRELS.

THE SHERIFF SHOWED, MUCH TOO LATE.
MOST OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE HAD FLED.
A FEW SATANISTS STAYED AROUND TO
WATCH AS THE INFERNO CLAIMED
THEIR CHAPEL.



WHAT
NOW, HAIN?
REBUILD
?

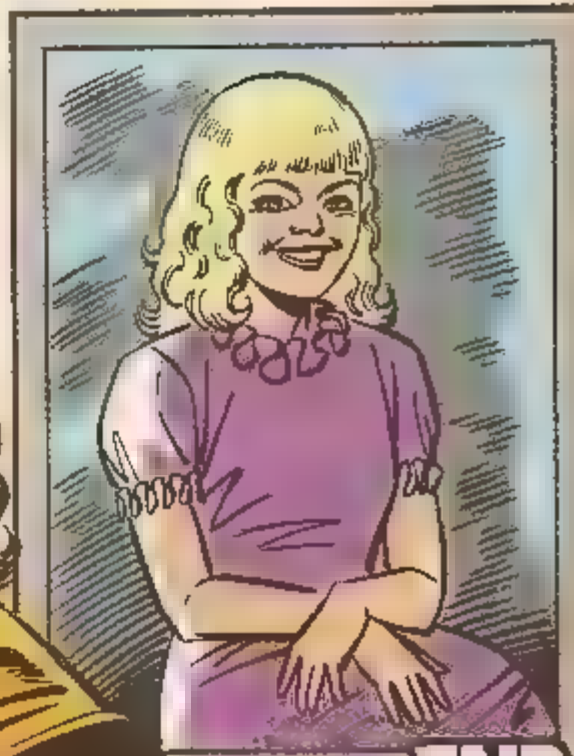
WHY BOTHER?
AFTER THE PUBLICITY
THIS'LL GENERATE --
NEWS STORIES, YOUR ARTICLE,
TALK SHOWS -- WE CAN
WRITE OUR OWN TICKET,
ANYWHERE.



THAT BASTARD'S
GOING TO PROFIT
OFF THIS!

IT'S AMERICA, SHERIFF,
COTTAGE INDUSTRIES AND
FREEDOM OF RELIGION.

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL. OR
AT LEAST A LITTLE FOR
KAREN MILLER.



END

SHAKEDOWN

SOMETIMES COPS CAN BE THE BIGGEST OUTLAWS OF ALL...

PLANT A GUN ON HIM, STALLINGS, AND LET S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE KILLED HIM, ROONEY

YOU HEAR WHAT I SAY, JERKOFF? LET S GET ROLLIN'!

ED GORMAN • GRAHAM NOLAN
writer artist

JOHN COSTANZA • SAM PARSONS
letterer colorist

KATIE MAIN • MIKE GOLD
development assoc. editor



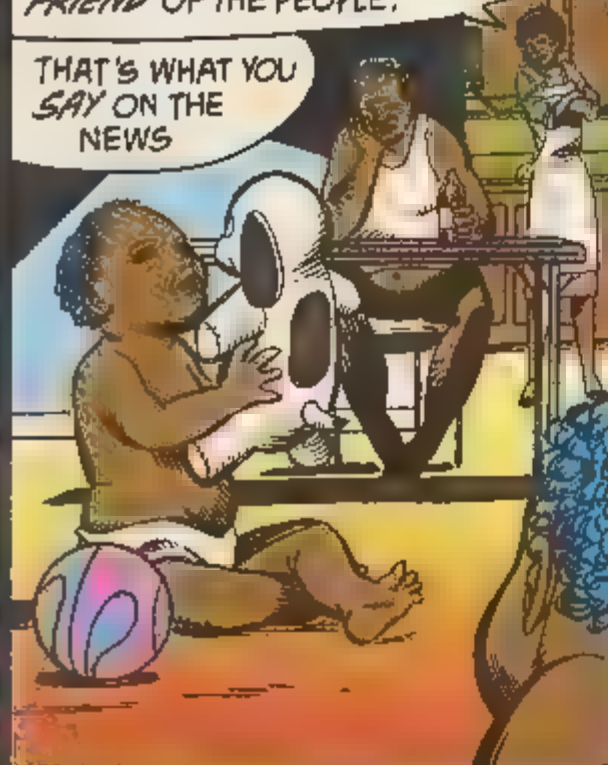
IF THERE IS SUCH A MAN
AS THIS MIDNIGHT, BLESSED
MOTHER, PLEASE SEND
HIM TO ME...



FOR DAYS, MRS. RAMIREZ TRIED
MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE FOR HELP.

I THOUGHT CHANNEL 3 WAS THE
FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE.

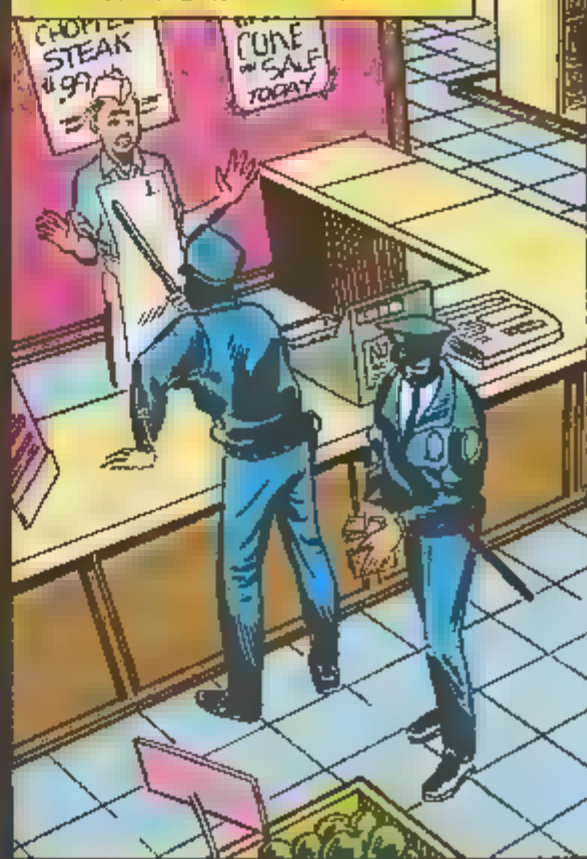
THAT'S WHAT YOU
SAY ON THE
NEWS



THESE TWO COPS ROONEY AND
STALLINGS, THEY HOLD THE
WHOLE BARRIO CAPTIVE.



"THEY STEAL FROM THE
MERCHANTS..."



"THEY BEAT ANYBODY THEY DON'T
LIKE."

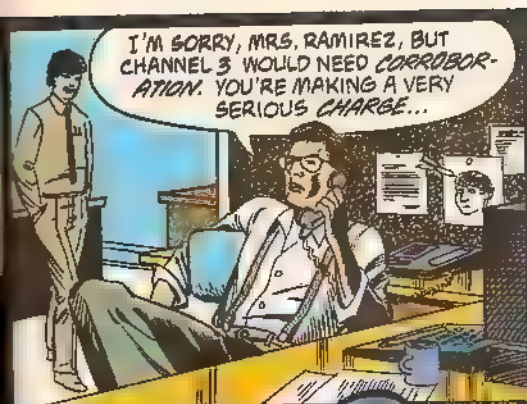


"A MONTH AGO THEY
RAPED MY DAUGHTER
CONNIE

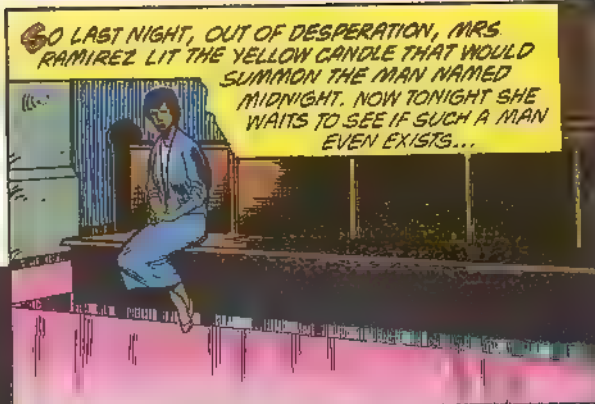


"WHEN MY SON JIMMY WENT TO
CONFRONT THEM ABOUT THIS,
THEY KILLED HIM. THEY PUT A
GUN IN HIS HAND AND SAID
THAT HE HAD TRIED TO SHOOT
THEM. BUT THAT IS A LIE..."





I'M SORRY, MRS. RAMIREZ, BUT CHANNEL 3 WOULD NEED CORROBORATION. YOU'RE MAKING A VERY SERIOUS CHARGE...

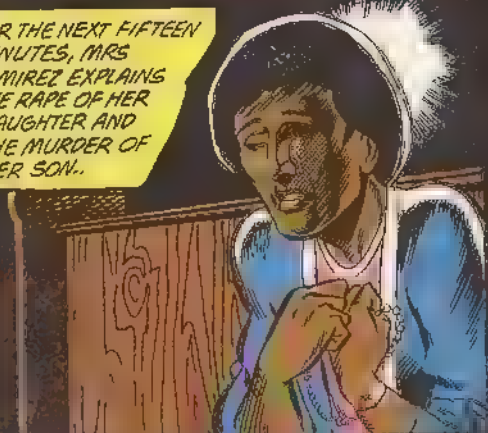


SO LAST NIGHT, OUT OF DESPERATION, MRS. RAMIREZ LIT THE YELLOW CANDLE THAT WOULD SUMMON THE MAN NAMED MIDNIGHT. NOW TONIGHT SHE WANTS TO SEE IF SUCH A MAN EVEN EXISTS...

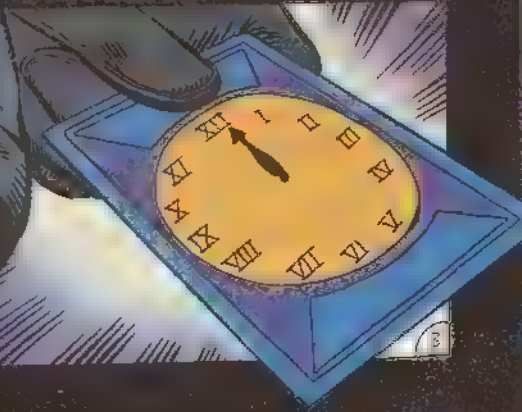


SUDDENLY THE AIR IS CHARGED, HOT, AS A SOMEWHAT MENACING FIGURE STEPS FROM THE SHADOWS...

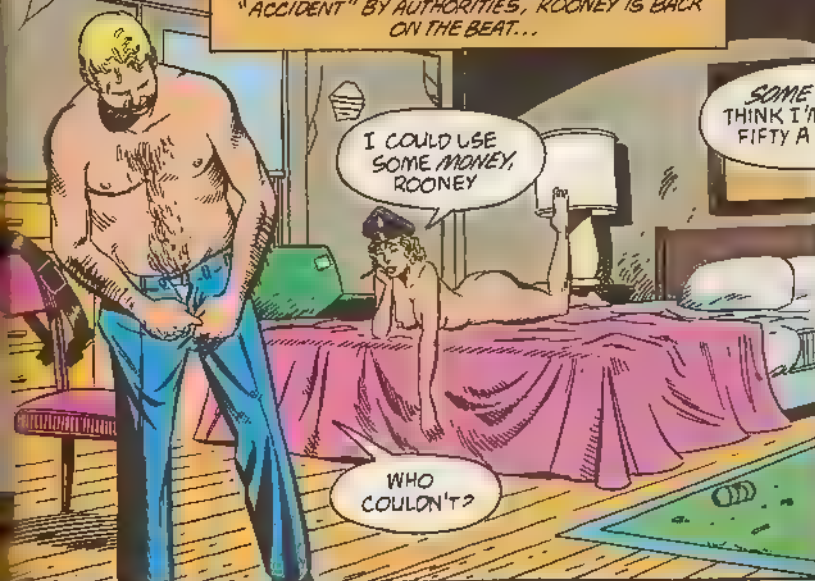
FOR THE NEXT FIFTEEN MINUTES, MRS. RAMIREZ EXPLAINS THE RAPE OF HER DAUGHTER AND THE MURDER OF HER SON.



MIDNIGHT LISTENS AND THEN



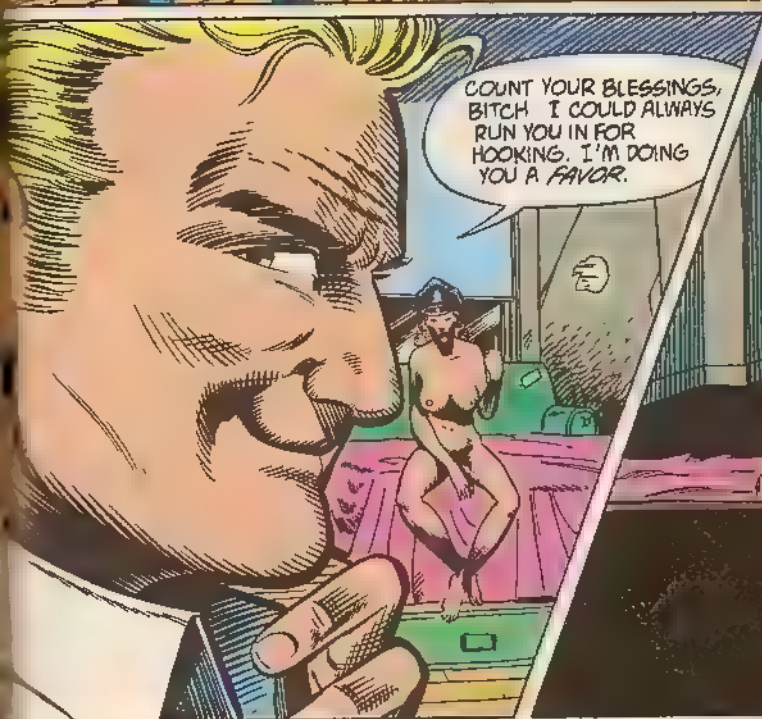
THREE WEEKS LATER, THE KILLING OF YOUNG JIMMY RAMIREZ HAVING BEEN RULED AN "ACCIDENT" BY AUTHORITIES, ROONEY IS BACK ON THE BEAT...



I COULD USE SOME MONEY, ROONEY

WHO COULDN'T?

SOME MEN THINK I'M WORTH FIFTY A POP.



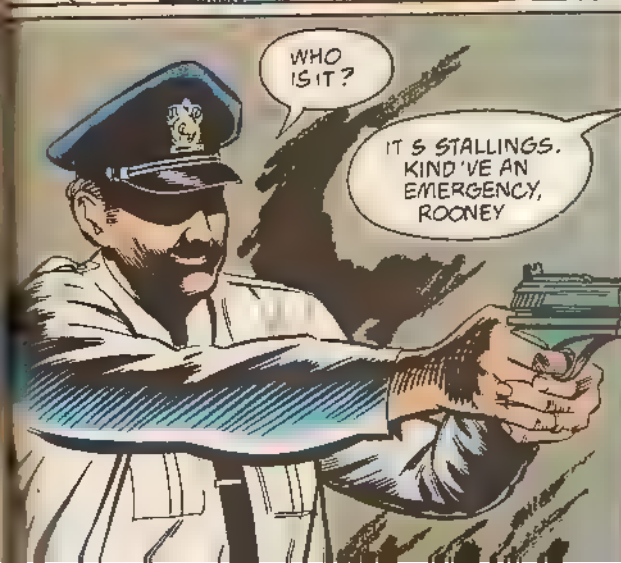
COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS, BITCH. I COULD ALWAYS RUN YOU IN FOR HOOKING. I'M DOING YOU A FAVOR.



KNOCK KNOCK

YOU EXPECTING COMPANY?

NO



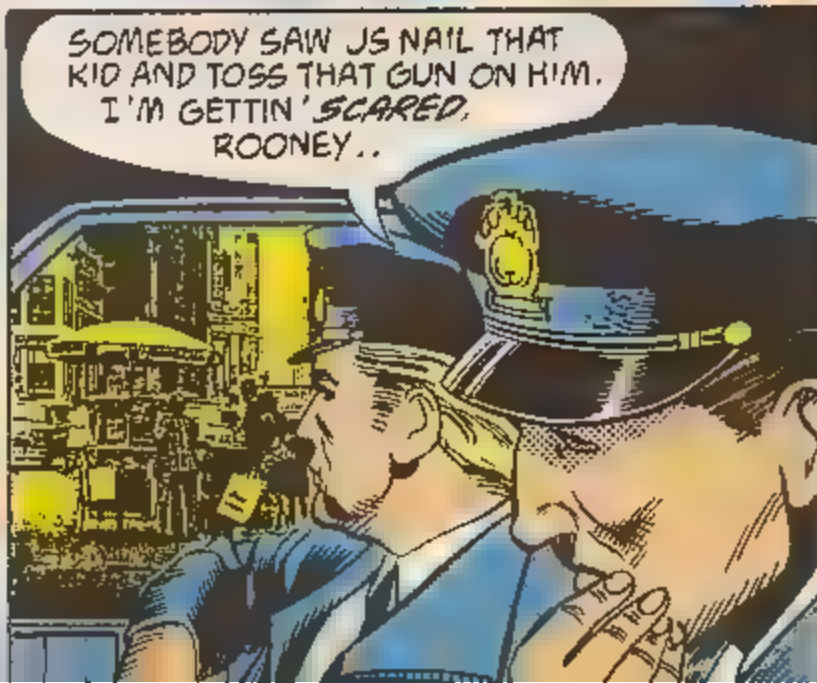
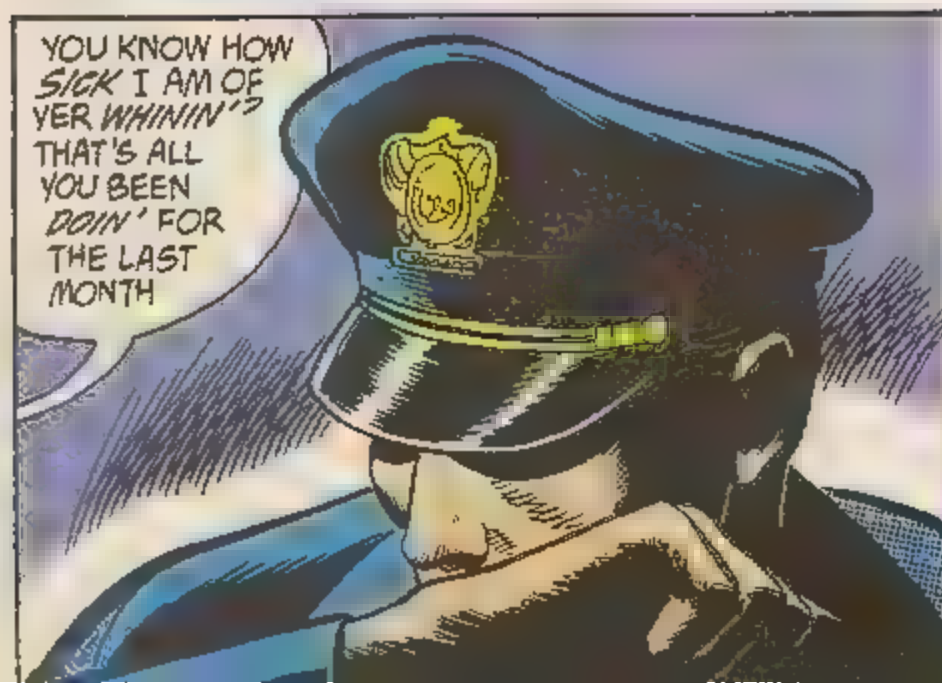
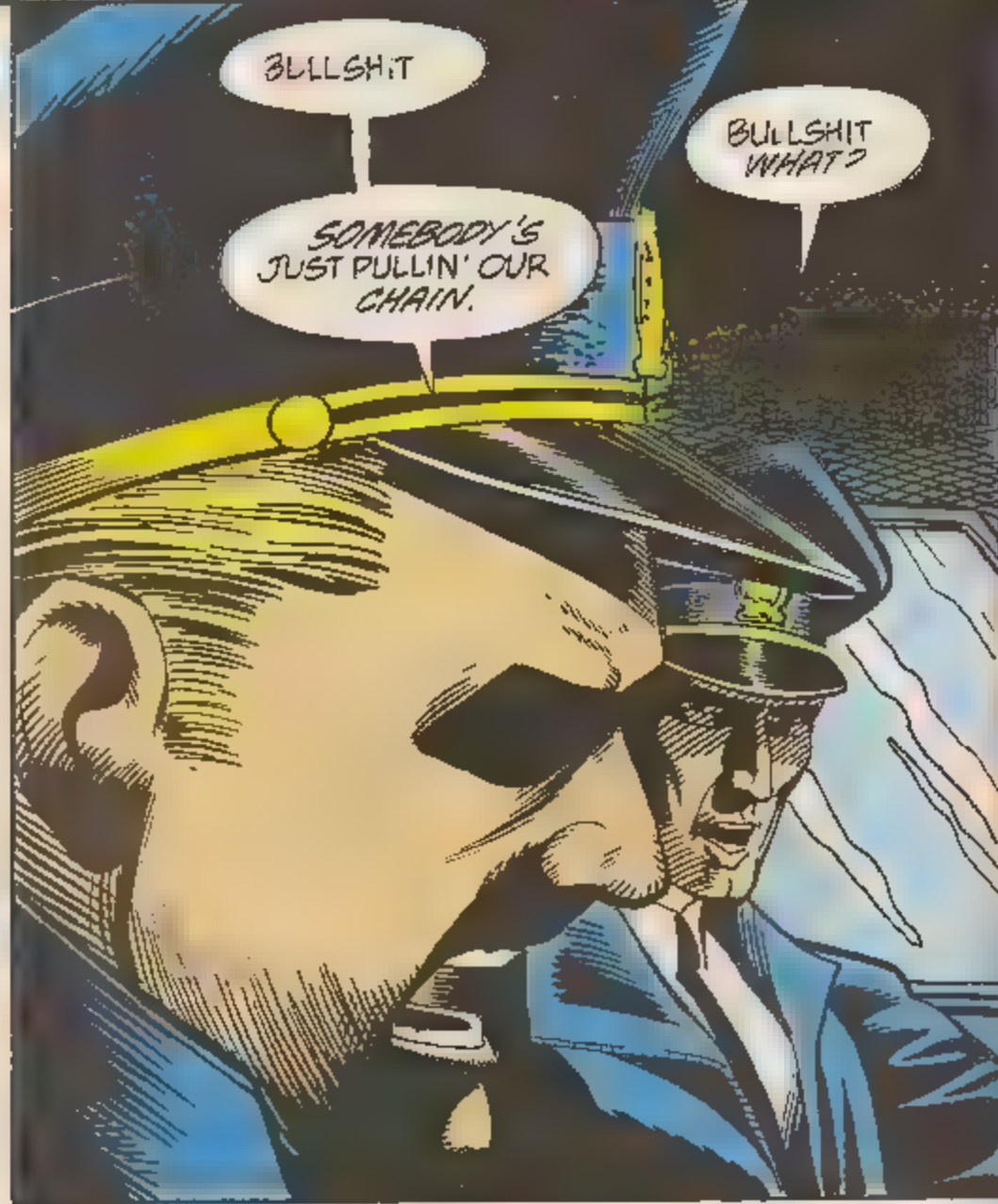
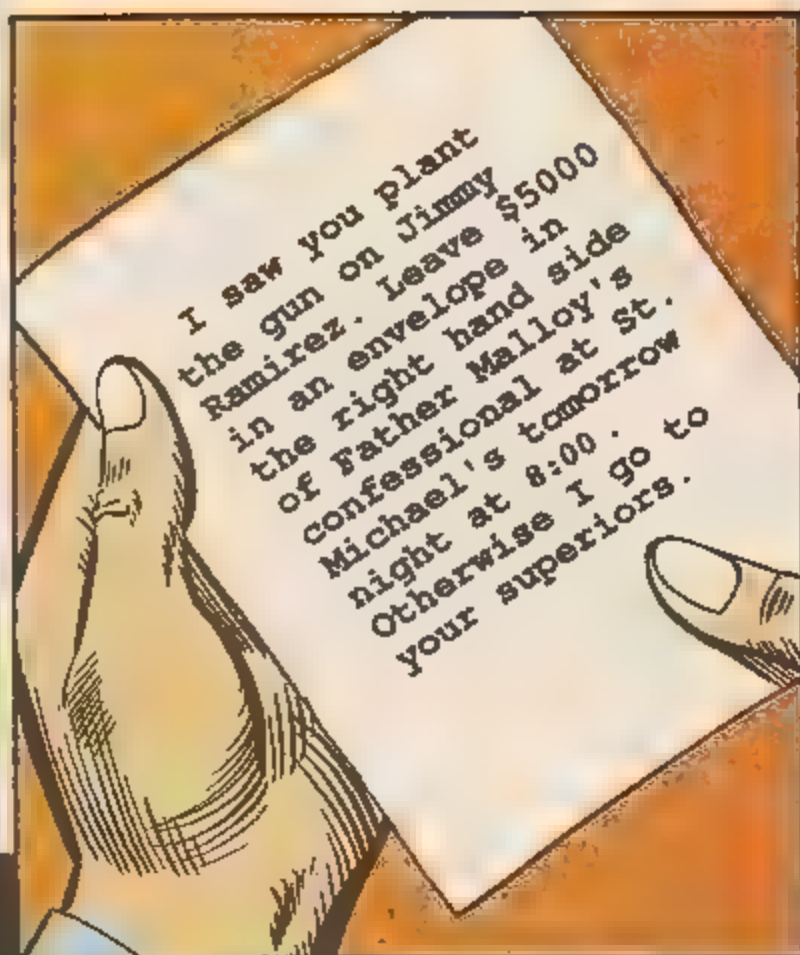
WHO IS IT?

IT'S STALLINGS. KIND'VE AN EMERGENCY, ROONEY



I'LL BE BACK NEXT WEEK FOR SOME MORE FUN, BABE

BE STILL MY HEART



FOR THE NEXT THREE HOURS, THE TWO MEN DO THEIR SWORN DUTY. SOMETIMES EVEN ROONEY AND STALLINGS HAVE TO BE HONEST, COMPETENT COPS...



IT HAPPENED AGAIN LAST NIGHT.

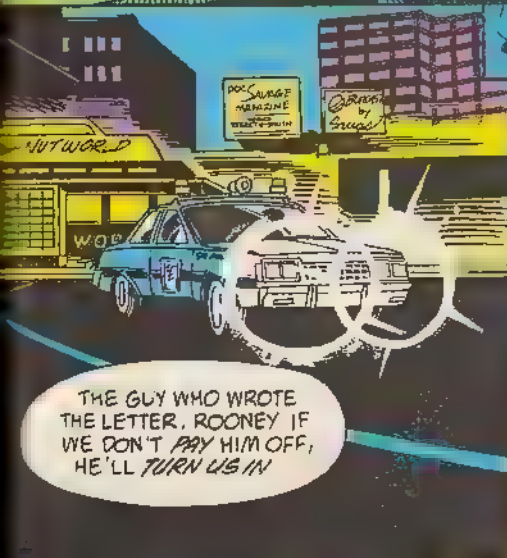
WHAT HAPPENED?

IN BED WITH MY WIFE. I COULDN'T DO IT.

THAT HAPPENS. NO BIG DEAL.



PLUS I CAN'T SLEEP RIGHT OR EAT RIGHT. I'M COMIN' APART, ROONEY.



THE GUY WHO WROTE THE LETTER, ROONEY IF WE DON'T PAY HIM OFF, HE'LL TURN US IN

I'VE GOT A LITTLE SURPRISE FOR YOU, STALLINGS I THINK WE SHOULD PAY HIM OFF, TOO

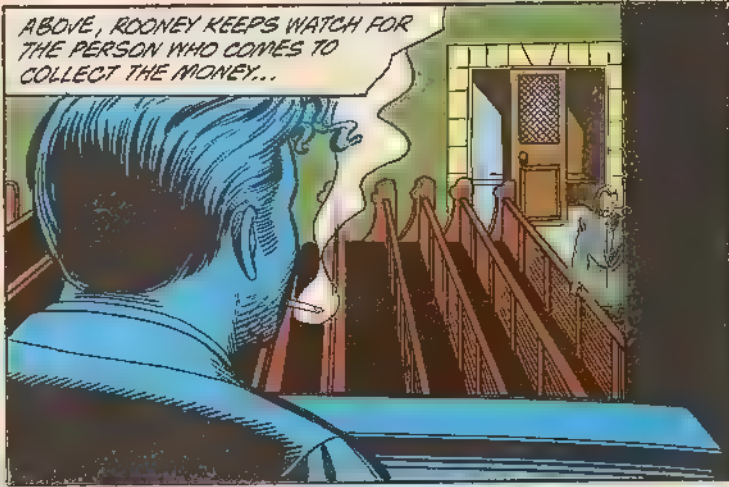


YOU DO?

EXT NIGHT AT 8:00 SHARP...



ABOVE, ROONEY KEEPS WATCH FOR THE PERSON WHO COMES TO COLLECT THE MONEY...



TOO BAD YOU'RE NOT GONNA
GET TO SPEND THAT FIVE
GRAND, POPS.

I DON'T THINK
WE SHOULD KILL HIM,
ROONEY

YOU'RE RIGHT.
I THINK I SHOULD
KILL BOTH OF
YOU.

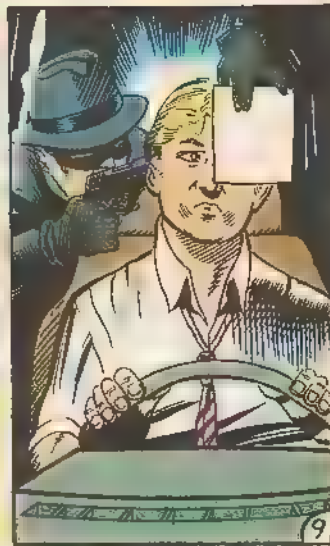
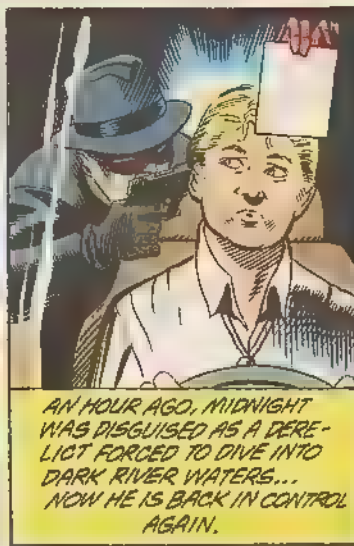
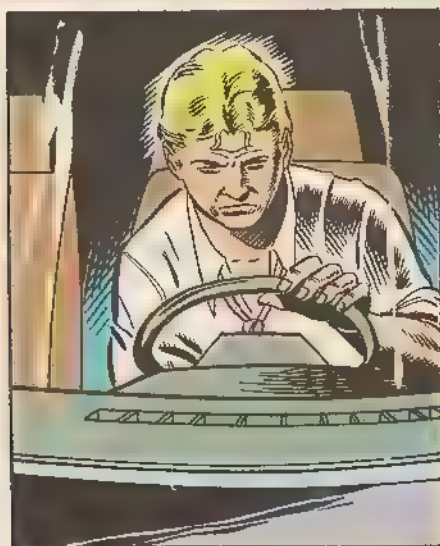
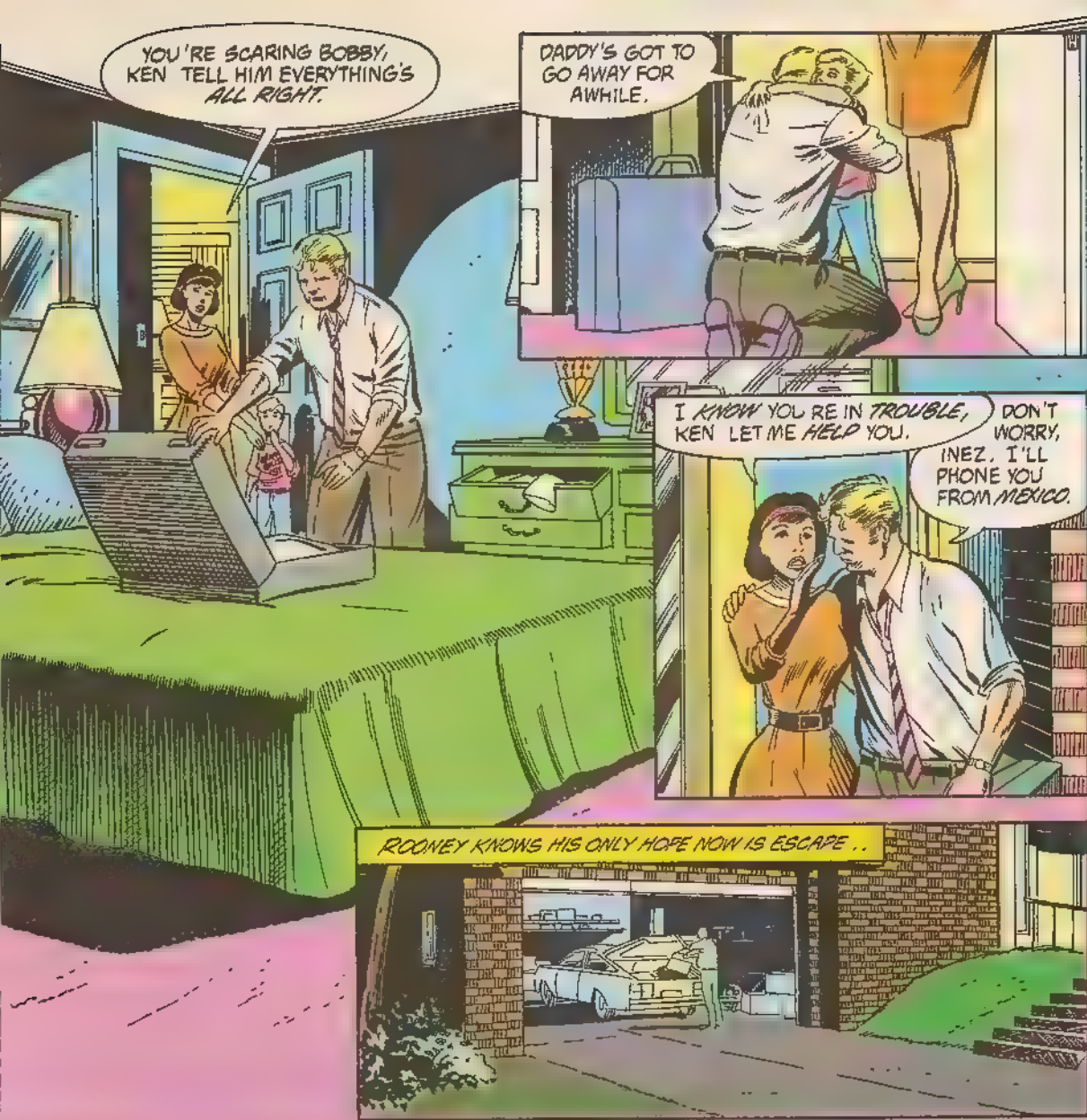
BLAM

BLAM

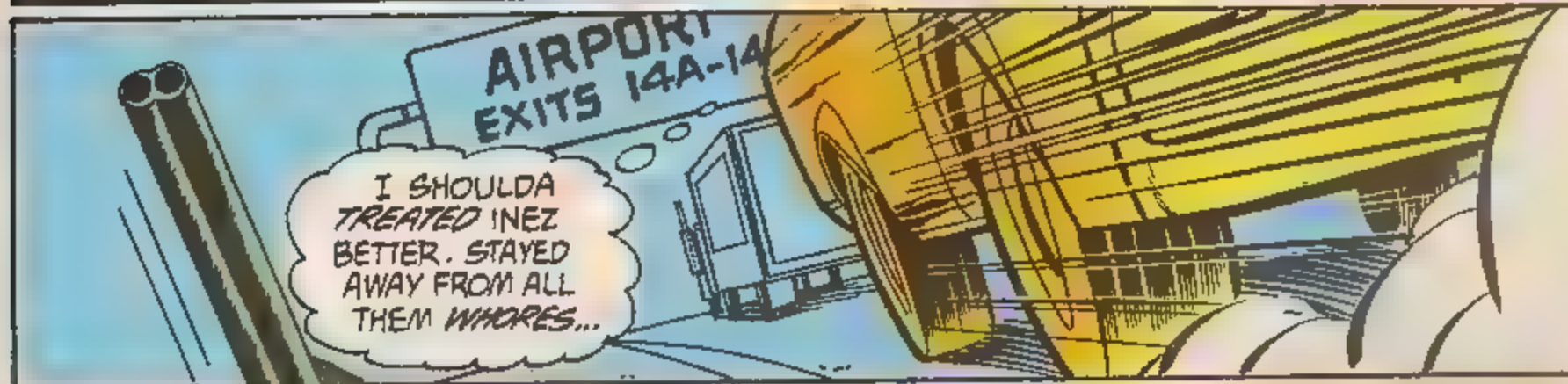
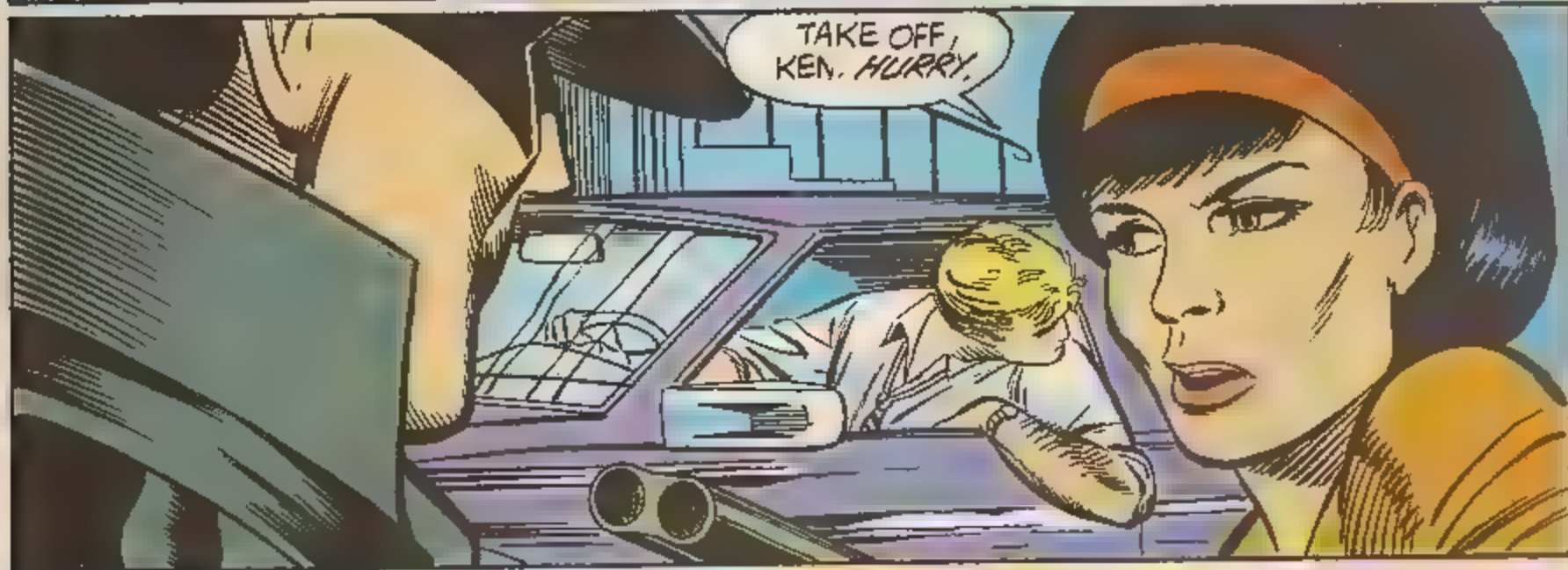
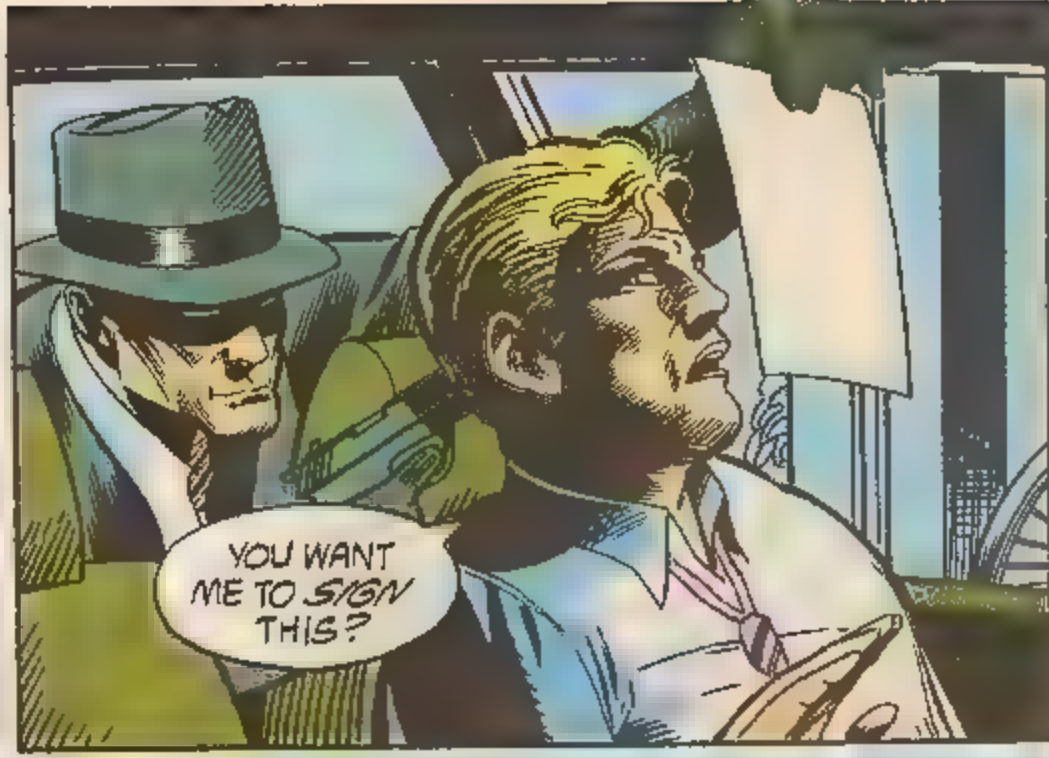
GOD DAMN SONSABITCHIN'
OLD MAN! WAIT TILL NEXT TIME!

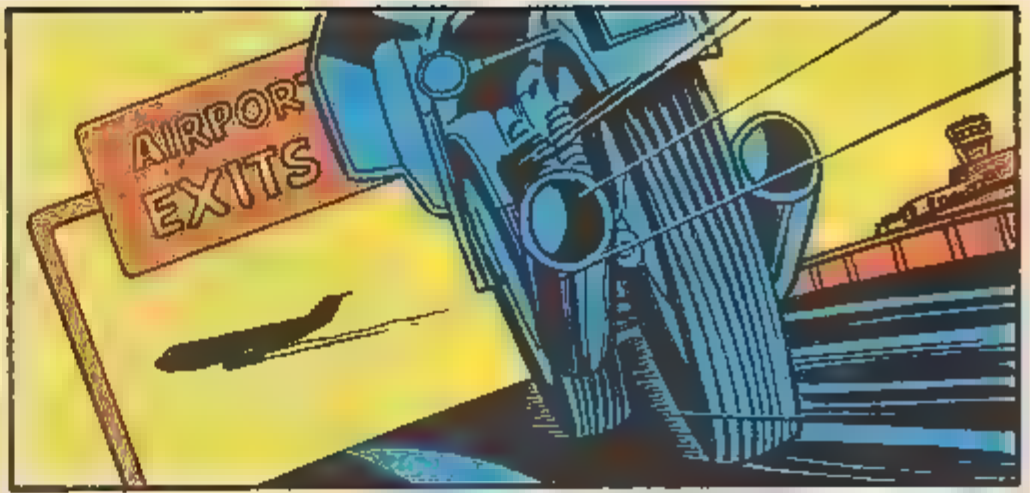
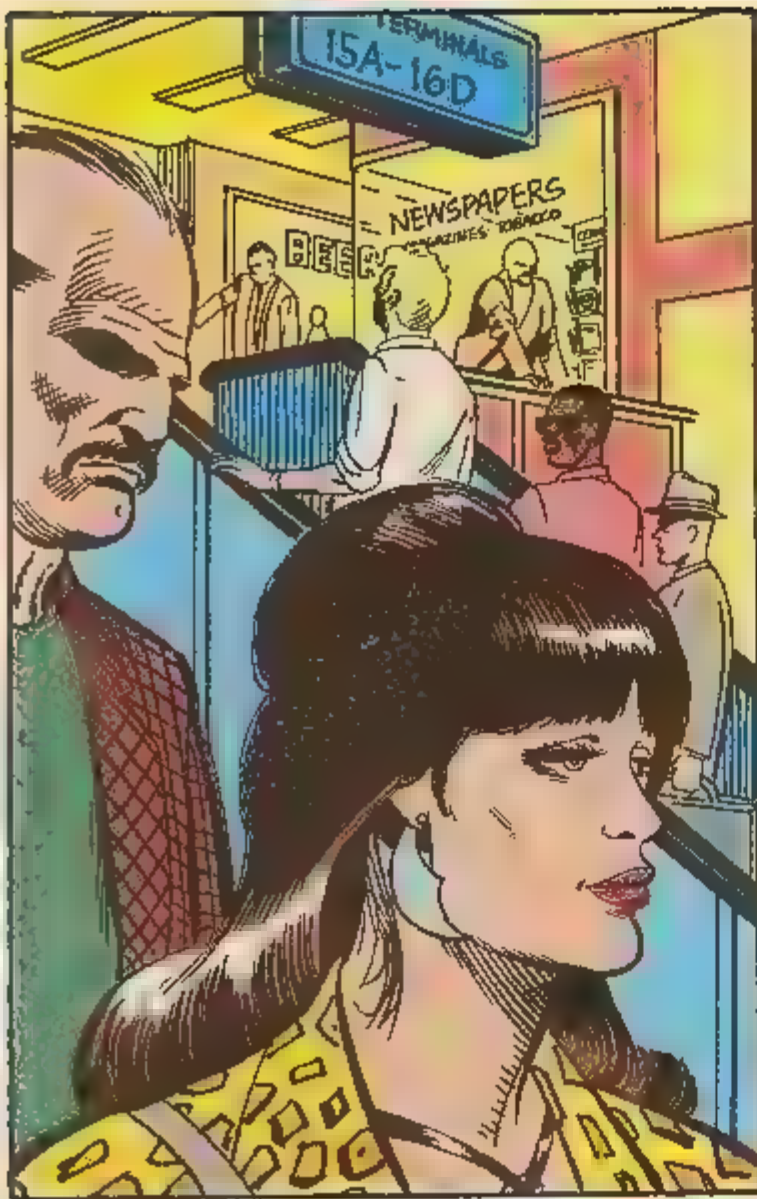
WHILE HIS PLAN HAD BEEN TO RID HIMSELF OF
BOTH A WEAK PARTNER AND A BLACKMAILER,
ROONEY HAS TO SETTLE FOR HALF A LOAF...

DEAD...

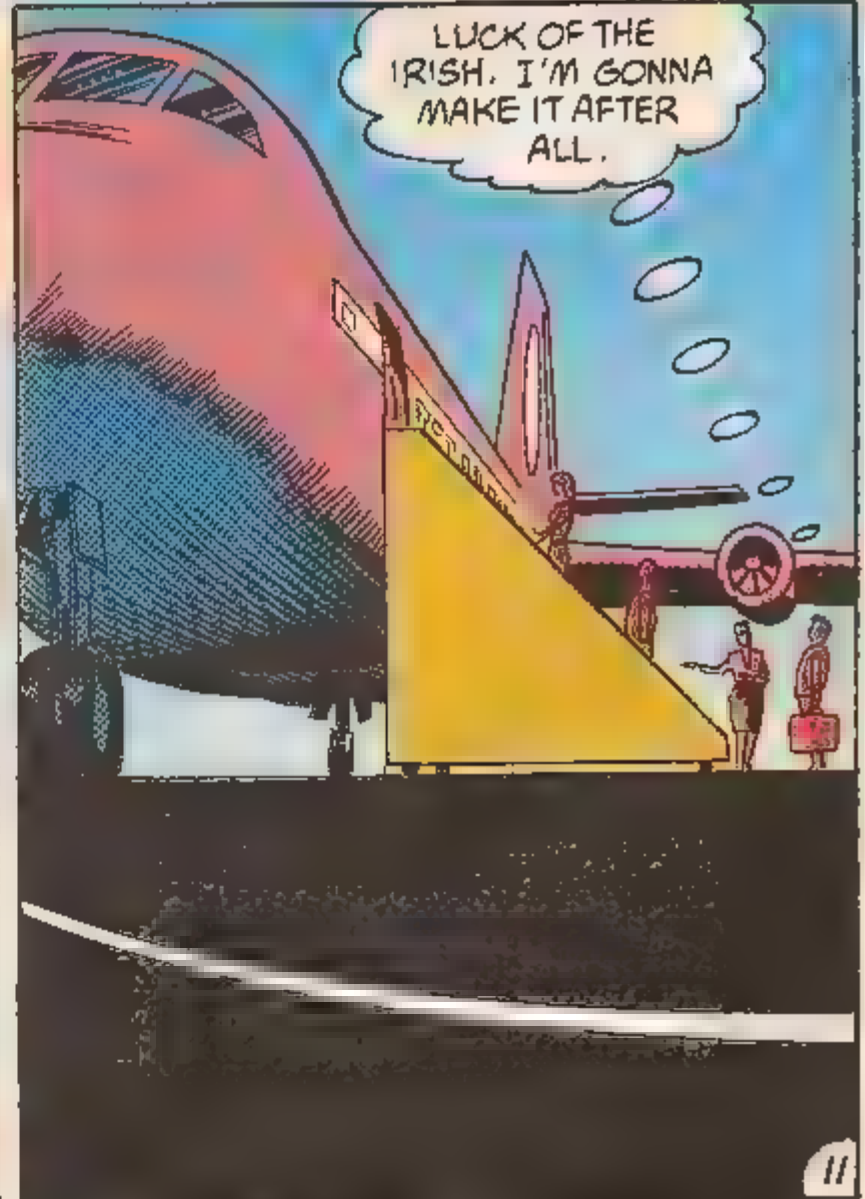
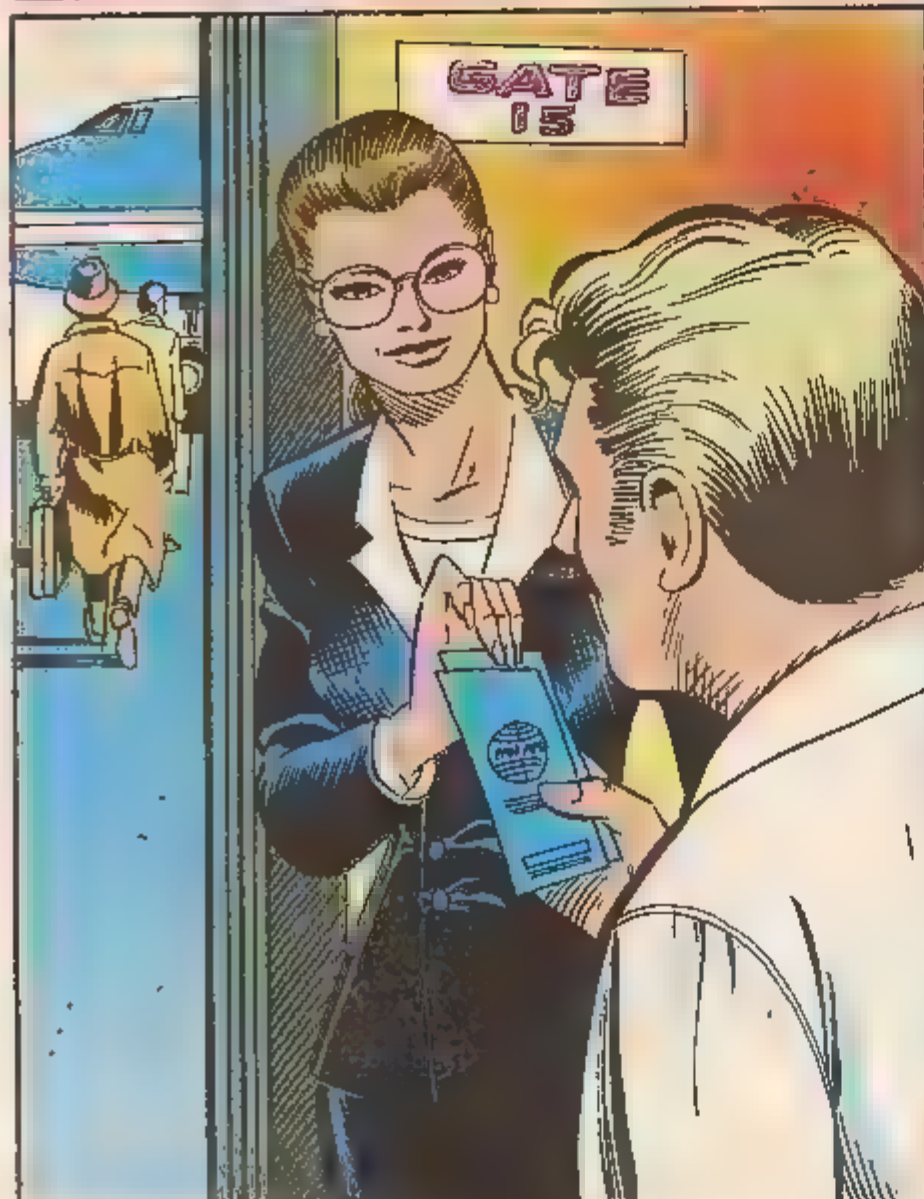
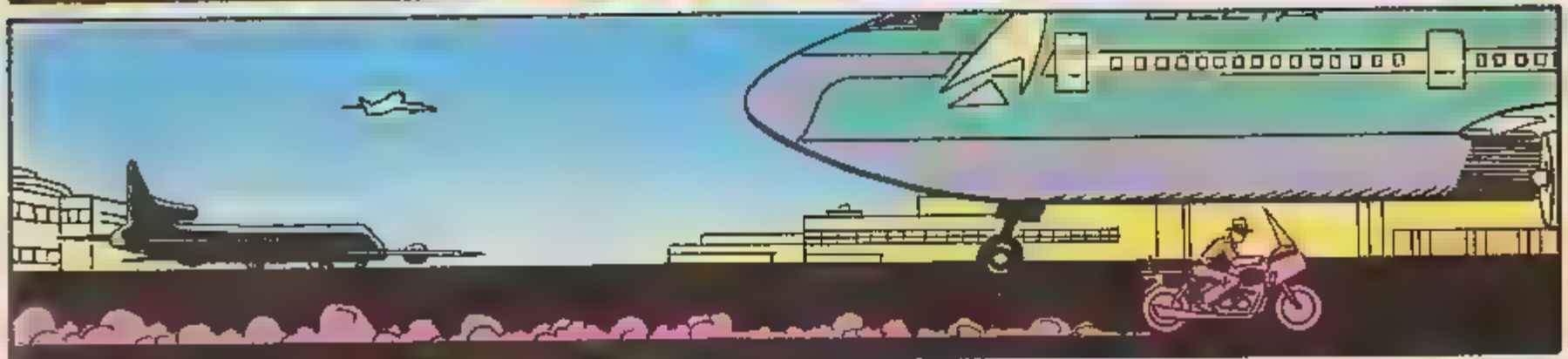
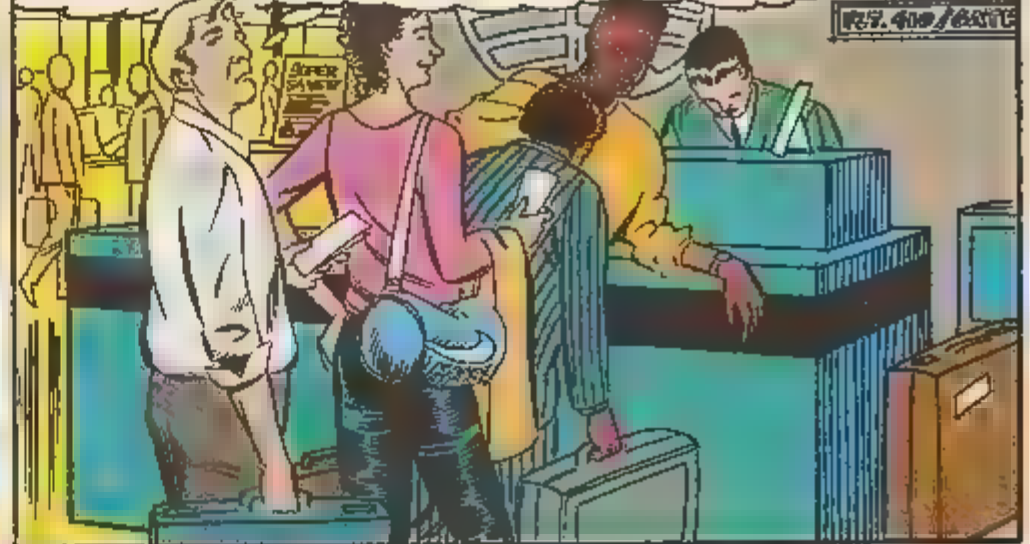


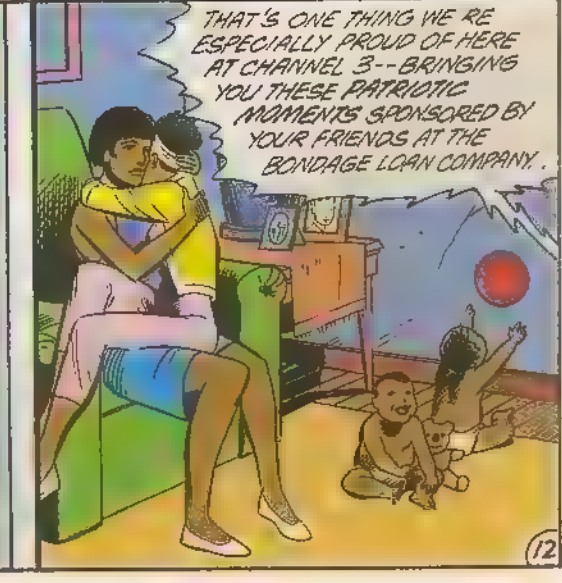
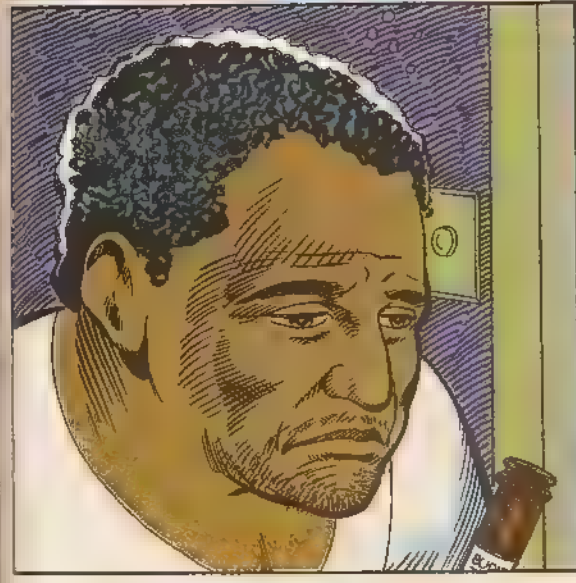
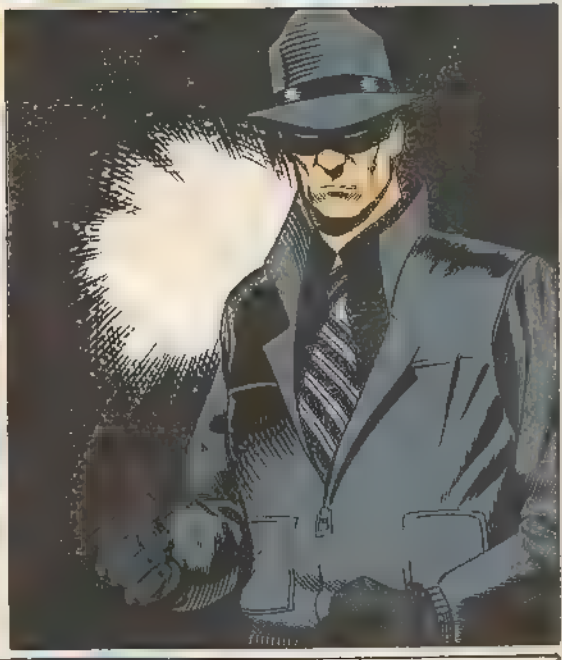
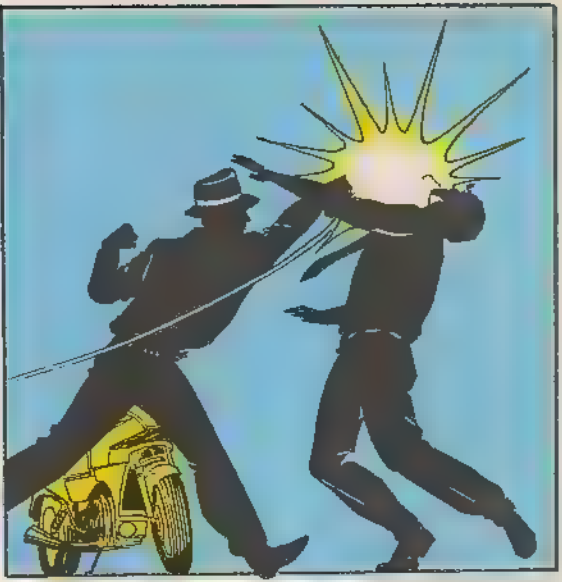
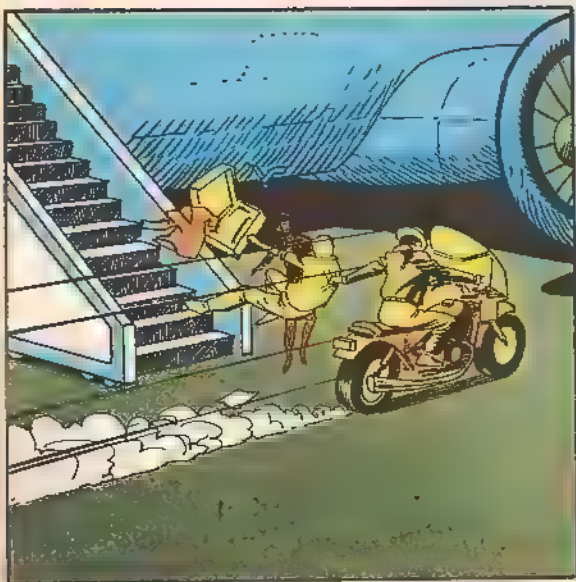
I, officer Kenneth
Rooney, freely
admit that I
killed Jimmy
Ramirez and
my partner, Wayne
Stallings.

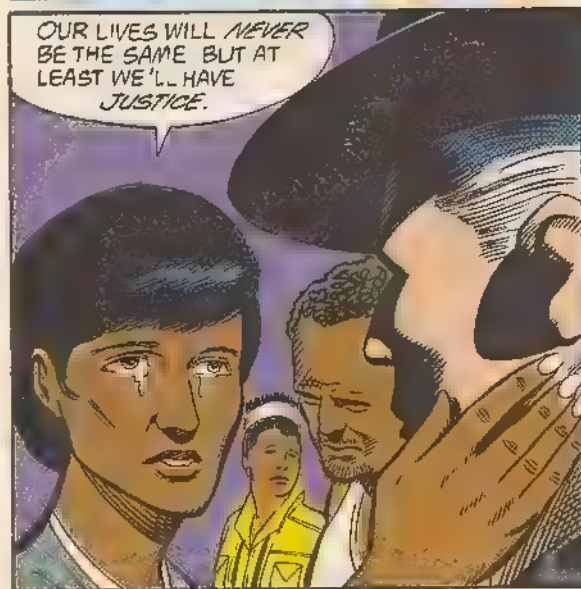




I'VE GOT TO WAIT IN LINE WHILE TWO **BLACK GUYS** AND SOME **DIP** WHO LOOKS LIKE A **QUEEN** GET WAITED ON FIRST. THIS COUNTRY IS STARTIN' TO SUCK.







John Butcher clung to the side of a cliff six hundred feet above the rocky scree on the eastern side of Buffalo Butte, twenty-two miles east of Mecklenberg, South Dakota. The sun was setting. Butcher was in shadow and already could feel a chill emanating from the rock. He had a set of thermal underwear in his pack, but he was in no position to change his clothes. He'd sunk a piton into the sandstone beneath a bulbous protrusion so that he was invisible to anyone standing above or directly below. Even a person scanning the cliff face knowing he was there would have had difficulty picking him out, so carefully had he insinuated himself into the weave of the stone.

"Become the stone, John, and not even the eagle can see you," his grandfather had told him. His grandfather had also told him the legend of Wovoka, the Paiute medicine man, who had taught the People to dance the Ghost Dance, so that the white man would disappear from the land and the buffalo would return. The Ghost Dance had been a pacifist ceremony, but because of it, the Army massacred dozens of men, women, and children at Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1890, the final crunching desecration of the Lakota Nation.

Now a Lakota medicine man named

Rupert Rains, who had taken the name Crippled Elk, was attempting to revive the ghost dance as a means to power. The problem with the old ghost dance, said Crippled Elk, was too much emphasis on faith and not enough on action. Dancing and singing won't do the job. You've got to grab a gun, put it to the white man's head and pull the trigger. And that's how you brought the buffalo back to the prairie.

Crippled Elk's interpretation held much appeal for bitter, disenfranchised Lakota

who found themselves unwanted tenants in their own land. Crippled Elk had become the Abu Nidal of the

Black Hills, setting off a series of explosions from the Wild Bill Hickok Saloon in Deadwood to the Federal Court Building in Rapid City. He had surrounded himself with a cadre of desperate, dangerous men who believed his every word and were willing to die for the cause. Great. Butcher admired conviction. But so far, the New Ghost Dance Movement had killed four innocent bystanders and injured sixteen, including a Lakota mother and her two children who happened to be making a deposit in one of the banks Crippled Elk had targeted.

Such activities turned off the majority of Lakota, but had attracted others who were sick of a hundred years of empty promises.



G H O S T

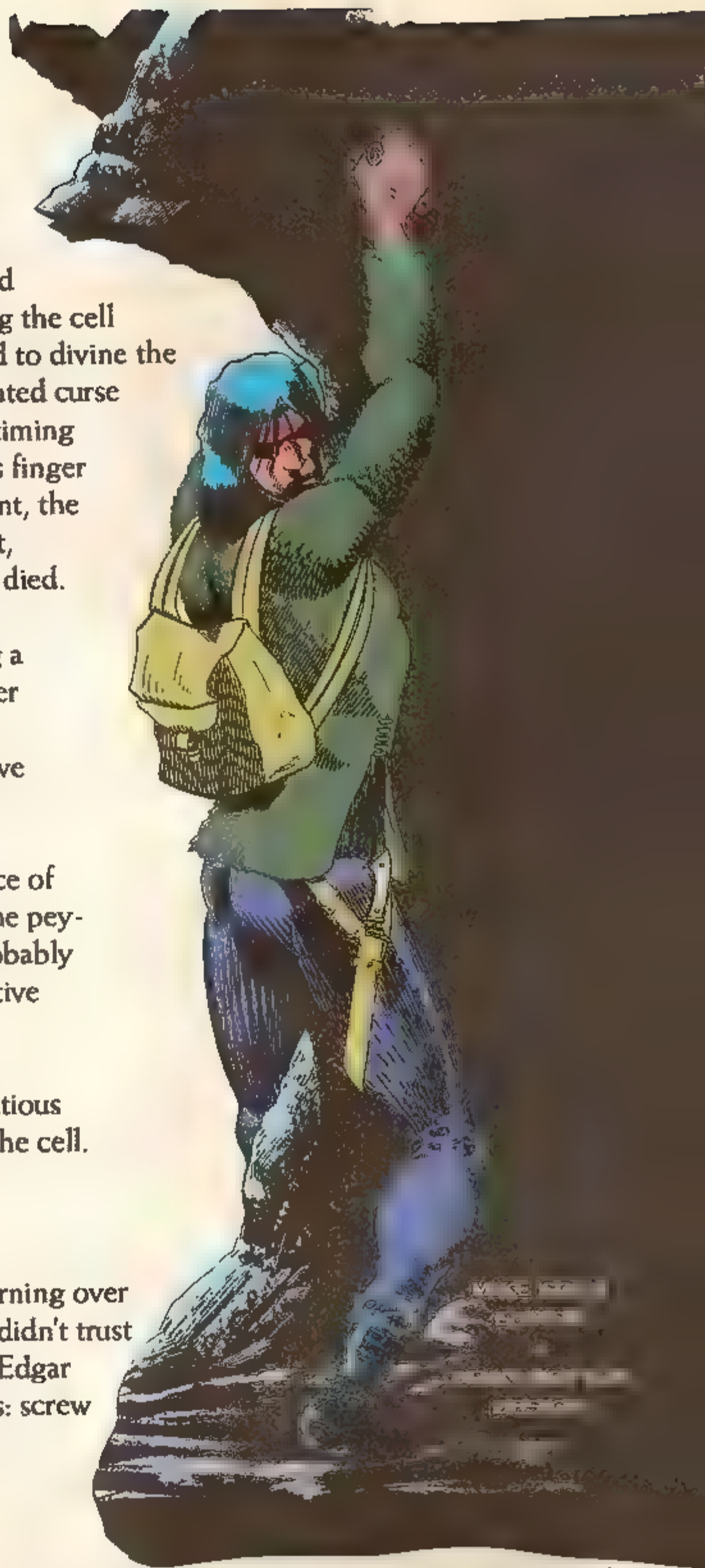
MIKE BARON • WRITER

Crippled Elk was a special effects genius who used his skills to convince his followers of his mystical abilities. On one occasion, Crippled Elk had learned of an FBI agent who had infiltrated one of his cells and had slipped the man a slow-acting poison. During the cell meeting, Crippled Elk had pretended to divine the agent's presence, then put a complicated curse on him in the Lakota language. His timing had been exquisite. As Crippled Elk's finger had come to rest pointing at the agent, the man had suddenly lurched to his feet, turned the color of an eggplant, and died. Butcher had seen it happen. He had stood at the back of the hall wearing a disguise, fingering the nine millimeter Glock at his belt, aching to act, but helpless. To reveal himself would have been instant death.

An autopsy had revealed the presence of basidiomycetes, which came from the peyote cactus of the Southwest, and probably had been supplied by a fraternal Native American terrorist organization.

Thereafter, Butcher had become cautious and did not attempt to re-infiltrate the cell. He did not want Crippled Elk to recognize him.

Nor did Butcher feel comfortable turning over what he had learned to the FBI. He didn't trust the FBI. The agency still clung to J. Edgar Hoover's attitudes toward minorities: screw 'em. The FBI regarded any mode of behavior outside a Fred MacMurray movie to be highly



DANCE

SHEA ANTON PENSA • ILLUSTRATOR



ques-
tionable. Now
that the communist bloc
had crumbled like stale angel-food, the
FBI held aloft the scary totem of terrorist
organizations. And of all the weirdos
operating in the United States, Native
Americans were potentially the scariest
because they most resembled such mod-
els as the IRA and the Pop-ular Front for
the Liberation of Palestine, paradigms of
their type.

They had nothing to lose. They
believed it was noble to die in battle for
their cause, and that they would be
rewarded in the afterlife. They were scat-
tered throughout the country and had
insinuated themselves into numerous
walks of life.

Butcher knew that most Native Ameri-
cans were peaceful, gentle people who
had no interest in going on the warpath.
But the examples of others, and their
own bleak history had created a signifi-
cant cadre of desperate men who
believed the only way they could redress
centuries of injustice was through
terrorist activity.

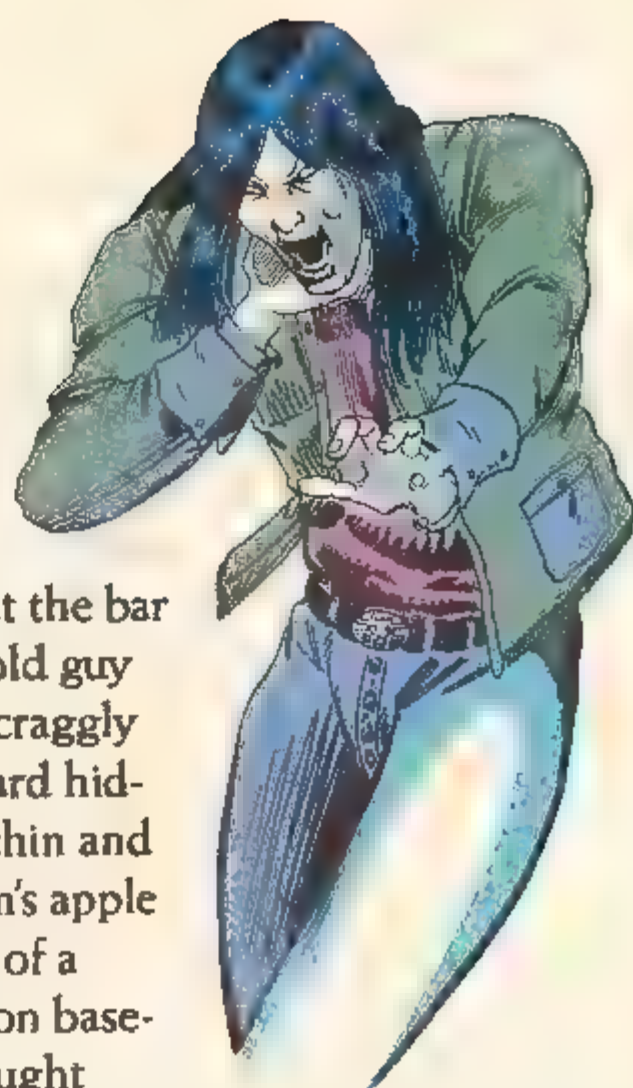
Butcher had learned of the Buffalo Butte
Meet almost by accident. He'd been rid-
ing his new Harley Fat Boy from the
dealership in Rapid City to a friend's
house on the Belle Fourche Reservation,
and had stopped at a roadside tavern in
the hills for a soft drink. As he'd entered
the cool, dusty log cabin, he saw three
Indians sitting at a table. They nodded to

him, he
nodded
back.

He sat at the bar
and an old guy
with a scraggly
grey beard hid-
ing no chin and
an Adam's apple
the size of a
regulation base-
ball brought
him an orange soda. The jukebox was
pumping out Bob Seger.

As Butcher sipped his soda, he watched
the men in the mirror behind the bar. He
could make out the words "Crippled Elk"
and "Buffalo Butte" before one of the men
loudly shushed the others. Butcher paid
more attention. He thought he might
have seen two of the men at the cell
meeting he'd infiltrated.

The three Indians at the table, having
freaked themselves by blurting out
secrets, now lapsed into friendly banter.
One of them had gone outside to look at
Butcher's bike, came back in and
approached him at the bar. Butcher
prayed that the man would not recognize
him. The man was about six feet tall and
narrow as a beam. He wore blue coveralls
over a blue workshirt, and red-and-white
Puma shoes. His glossy black hair was
cut to the scalp on the sides, but sprung
up like a hedge on top.





"Nice Fat Boy," the man said. "Just pick her up?"

Butcher nodded. "John Butcher," he said, holding out his hand. The man shook it.

"Wesley Wilson. I used to have a Low Rider, but some crackers in a pickup truck tried to run me off the road one night and that was that. Didn't even have no insurance. Now I'm saving up my pennies — I aim to get me another one as soon as I get it together. How you like it?"

"She's a fine ride, if you're not in a hurry." Butcher had wanted to hang around, learn more. But he did not want to make himself memorable. He finished his soda and sauntered out of the air-conditioned bar into the baking sun of late afternoon. A small pool of moisture had gathered on the concrete beneath the Fat Boy.

"Damn," Butcher muttered, getting down to examine the problem. The fools had

put too much oil in the crankcase and it had popped a seal in the heat. It didn't look too serious — Butcher was sure he would be able to make the reservation without repairs. While he hunkered on the concrete examining his bike, the door opened and one of the men stood there in the entrance, turning back, talking to the others.

"See you on the butte, one week from tonight." He held his fist in a power salute, turned toward the parking lot and saw Butcher working on his bike. Butcher studiously ignored him, hoping the man would not recognize him, or think that he'd been paying attention.

The man came over. "Nice bike," he said. He looked at Butcher. Butcher looked back and smiled.

"Thanks." The man hadn't recognized him. Butcher had worn a wig to the cell meeting, and contact lenses that turned his brown eyes hazel. He had carried

himself differently and spoken differently, and it had been dark at the meeting. The man hung around, a little nervous.

"Where you from, brother?"

"West of here. Little place in Wyoming called Lance Creek."

"Sure, I know Lance Creek. You know a man there named Art Jeune? Runs the Ace Hardware?"

"No, can't say as I do."

The man slapped himself in the forehead.

"Whoops!

Art's over in Fish

Creek, Nebraska. I

always get those places mixed up. See you around, bro." The man got into his pickup and left. Butcher got on his hog and rode.

In the following days, he'd leaned on his sources hard to discover the nature of the meeting that would take place on Buffalo Butte. Talk of the Ghost Dance had been around for six months, since Crippled Elk had adopted the term for his organization. Members of the cell spoke of "doing the Ghost Dance," when they planned to detonate a bomb, or rob a bank, their second most popular activity.

When he finally put the pieces together, it was hard to believe. Crippled Elk was planning to stage a Ghost Dance ceremony atop Buffalo Butte and produce the long-dead Shatter Eye, a bloodthirsty shaman who'd sought to match the white man atrocity for atrocity. In 1892, American troops on horseback, motorcycle,

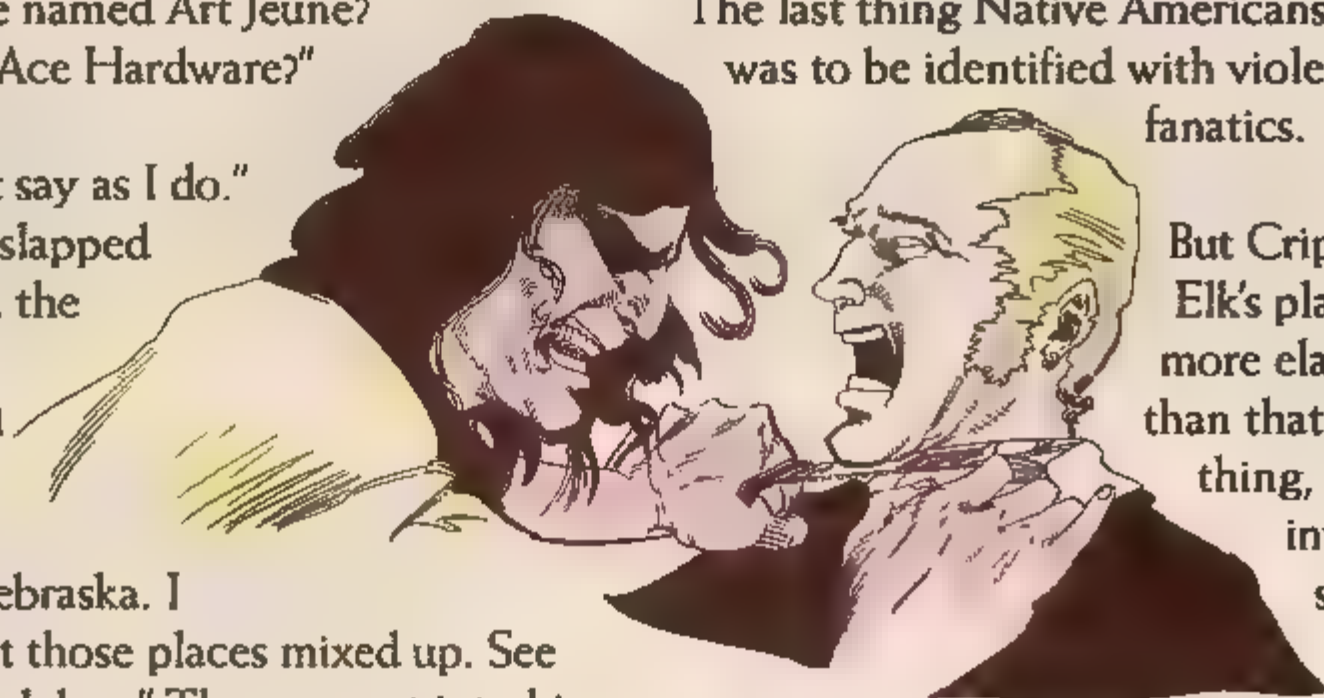
and car had chased the last remnants of Shatter Eye's band into a Manitoba Blizzard. He was never seen again, and was presumed to have died.

Shatter Eye had since become a symbol of Native American resistance — the type of resistance that would, in Butcher's mind, provoke a white backlash which would set back Indian rights a decade. The last thing Native Americans needed was to be identified with violent fanatics.

But Crippled Elk's plan was more elaborate than that. For one thing, it might involve some sort of sacrifice.

Although Butcher had never heard of Lakota or any of the other plains tribes performing sacrifice, other groups had not been so reluctant. What form this sacrifice would take, Butcher wasn't sure. He hoped that if it were true, it would involve an animal. And that was just the warm-up.

Somewhere on the Butte, considered sacred by all Indians, Crippled Elk had hidden a large cache of weapons and explosives. Using unspecified special effects, he planned to present himself as Shatter Eye reincarnate, to arm his men on the spot and present them with a series of plans — from five to eight, accounts varied — to blow up municipal buildings, rob banks, and kidnap important whites. The new Shatter Eye would stage an event to convince his followers that he possessed magical powers, and





send them out on the spot to instantly and simultaneously execute his multifarious plans. During the Boxer Rebellion, some kung fu masters had tricked their followers into believing they were invulnerable to bullets by standing up to blanks. Wovoka himself had produced ghost shirts which he claimed would render the wearer invulnerable.

Butcher was convinced that if Crippled Elk carried out his insane plan, many of his young followers would die — as well as innocent civilians. So Butcher had concocted a bold scheme: he would wait until Crippled Elk had "transformed" himself into Shatter Eye. Then Butcher would enter the circle of fire, claiming that *he* was the true Shatter Eye and Crippled Elk was an impostor. After that, he'd play it by ear. It wasn't a bad plan, but it had inherent flaws. Crippled Elk, who stood five feet five inches tall, weighed 245 lbs., none of it fat, like a hyper-thyroid Indian Dwight Muhammad Qawi. Butcher weighed 165 and didn't know if he could take him.

Butcher had a black belt in shorin-ryu, and had beaten many larger men. But he was realistic. Crippled Elk was a graduate of the Che Guevara School for Infiltration and Sabotage on Cuba. They had some of the best martial arts instructors in the world. Crippled Elk had messed up all sorts of people, including numerous law enforcement officers.

Butcher parked his bike at Perry Thigpen's house, a pre-fab three-room shack at the edge of a desolate field. The hard dirt yard was filled with abandoned tires and engine blocks, but Perry was nowhere to be found. Perry had been working at an auto supply store in Dead-

wood, but had recently lost his job and was at loose ends. John had hoped to talk with his friend and see if there was anything he could do to help, but it would have to wait.

Butcher prepared his gear and went into the scrub hills to the north to purify himself for the coming battle. It had been a long time since he'd practiced the ceremony, but the knowledge never left him. In ancient times, he would have fasted to induce a vision. But Butcher had learned too much — he would need his strength. He was certain that Wankan Tanka understood the demands of a new age and forgave him for the alterations he had made. So Butcher walked into the scrub prairie with a sixty-pound pack containing dehydrated beef stroganoff and chocolate as well as the red pipe-stone and he would offer to the four corners of the earth.

He stayed in the tent for two nights while he worked on the old sweat lodge. The poles and skins had been torn down a hundred times, but the circular depression with the fireplace remained, pristine and ready as it had stood for a hundred years. After Butcher had rigged the frame from local saplings and pieces of canvas, he set up the specially-prepared liquid propane stove, modified to hold a brazier filled with stones. No way, in that picked-over place, would he have been able to gather sufficient firewood to build a decent fire. The lodge's entrance faced east. Butcher stripped himself and entered, carrying only a spray of sage.

Normally, a helper would have assisted him with the stones, but he had already placed these in the stove. He had also brought water from a nearby creek and

used it to fill a large corrugated steel wash basin.

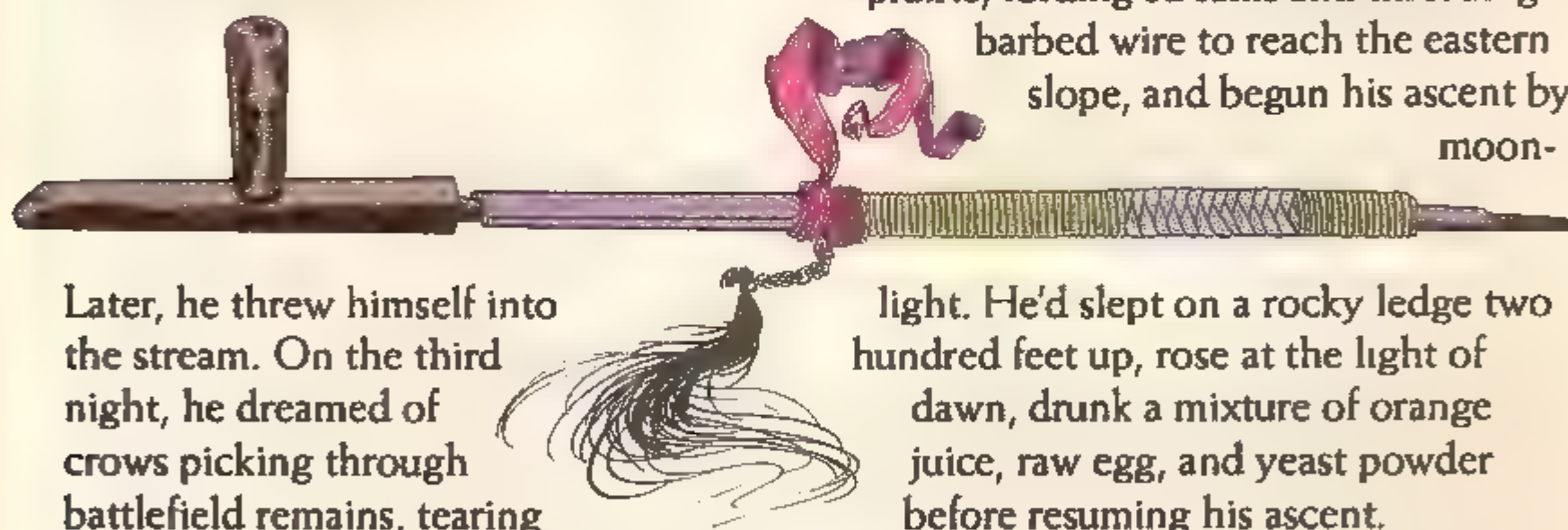
For three days, Butcher prayed, ate sparingly, and carefully reviewed his life in preparation for the coup. He rose at dawn and bowed naked before the sun. He returned to the lodge and smoked the pipe four times, turning to point the stem to the four corners of the earth. He flicked water on the stones and when the heat became unbearable, chewed sage and spat it on the stones. Everything was done in sets of four. From time to time he would peer out the entrance at the small vision hill, or hambelachiya he had built three feet from the entrance. On the third day, he thought he saw the miniature outline of a woman's moccasin, a good omen.

from a tree.

Buffalo Butte was located in the Belle Fourche National Grasslands. Its remote location made it unpopular with tourists, but to the Lakota and a few other tribes, it was the most sacred place on Earth — more sacred, even, than the Black Hills.

Butcher knew that Crippled Elk would have his followers on the Butte masquerading as peaceful, devout worshippers days in advance. It was probable that members of the Ghost Dance Cell were on the Butte at all times, working in shifts, to safeguard their cache and recruit new members.

Butcher had made his approach at night, running eight miles over the rolling prairie, fording streams and threading barbed wire to reach the eastern slope, and begun his ascent by moon-



Later, he threw himself into the stream. On the third night, he dreamed of crows picking through battlefield remains, tearing gobbets of flesh from the ribs of a black horse. A bad omen. Just before dawn, he dreamed he was grappling with the Trickster, who had the face of Randall Corvus, the man who had murdered his parents. He woke abruptly, in a sweat, to the rumble of an early morning thunderstorm. He realized that his vision quest was over.

He took two days to recover from the sweat lodge, drinking Gatorade and working out in his friend's backyard, running and hitting a heavy bag hung

light. He'd slept on a rocky ledge two hundred feet up, rose at the light of dawn, drunk a mixture of orange juice, raw egg, and yeast powder before resuming his ascent.

It had taken him four hours to reach the indentation where he had waited for dusk. It was time for the final ascent. Strapping the holstered Colt .45 behind his left hip, Butcher adjusted his crampons, ammunition, and water and prepared to swing out on the nylon line he'd affixed to a rock protrusion ten feet overhead. From where he crouched clinging to the piton, he could not see straight down to the ground, six hundred feet below. But when he swung out on the line, he would be hanging directly above



the rocks. He had only himself to rely on — if anything happened to that line he'd be buzzard food.

Butcher practiced his tanjin breathing as Tsunami had taught him years ago on Okinawa. When he felt calm but slightly exhilarated, he squeezed his grip around the line and gently let go of the piton. The breeze chilled the sweat on his face and torso as he swung toward the eastern horizon and for an instant, as his swing carried him beyond the rocky protrusion that had concealed him from above, he could hear men conversing in excited snatches and the beat of drums. He looked up. He was too close to the side of the butte for him to see anyone on top, and they weren't looking down. His luck held.

Butcher worked his way up over the pro-

trusion and paused on a six-inch shelf. He was now ten feet beneath the top of the butte and he could hear the men more clearly, but the words were indistinct, stifled by angle and distance. He looked back toward the east, which was now cloaked in darkness. Around the edges of the butte, to the north and south, he could see fading light the color of burnt macaroni as the sun set. It was decidedly chilly on the rock, despite the thermals rising from the prairie below. A curious owl glided soundlessly by, carrying a mouse in its beak.

Butcher nodded to the owl. "Here's to you, little brother," he whispered into the wind. At least it hadn't been a crow. If it had, Butcher would have considered abandoning the mission, because that would have been a very bad sign.

Inch by inch, Butcher hauled himself up the cliff face until his gloved hands gripped a sharp protrusion from which he could boost himself onto a ledge four feet below the table that was the top of Buffalo Butte. The butte top was not completely flat — it rolled and rippled like an old pool table left out for a winter, and was covered with configurations of massive boulders, the pool balls of some giant. The butte was roughly a quarter mile in diameter at the top. Cautiously, Butcher slithered over the edge of the rim and crawled into the midst of a jumble of boulders. Feeling his way with his gloved hand, he made enough noise to discourage any reptiles that might have crawled into the rocks to sleep. Crouching, he was able to peer through a triangle-shaped partition straight to the center of the butte, where Crippled Elk's men had constructed a large bonfire in the traditional place, a ten-foot fire hold rimmed by large boulders. Carefully, Butcher counted as many as he could see. He counted twenty-four, but figured on at least a dozen more who would be stationed around the rim and on the lower depths as lookouts.

Six men sat cross-legged in a bunch beating on drums, bongos, a tambourine, and fakes of nonexistent ceremonial drums purchased at souvenir stands throughout the west. A boom box puffed out "Fight the Power," but was overwhelmed by the drums and the breeze.

Men were laughing and talking among

themselves, and from the wild gyrations of some of the dancers, they were drinking. Butcher searched the crowd man by man for Crippled Elk but the Lakota medicine man was nowhere to be found. Butcher settled himself for another wait. By the rising moon it was not yet nine o'clock and the last orange brown residue of the day was slipping between the peaks of the hills to the west.

Wesley Wilson stepped out of the shadows into the circle of light holding an assault rifle. Aiming at the stars, he fired a full clip. The staccato ripping sound seemed to go on forever as brass shells glinted in the firelight before falling to the ground. When at last the gun fell silent, the drumming stopped and all eyes were on Wilson.

"Okay!" he shouted. "We're all here. The Great Spirit's lookin' down and smiling and sayin' get to it! We got one to lead us now, and one to lead us later. Who's gonna lead us?"

"Crippled Elk!" the assembly shouted.

"Who?" Wilson demanded.

"Crippled Elk! Crippled Elk! Crippled Elk!" The chant built in intensity until it took on a life of its own, defying the vastness of the night sky and the efforts of the wind to flick it away. Concealed in boulders two hundred feet from the action, Butcher felt their atavistic power and could not prevent himself from reacting.

C O N T I N U E D I N
N E X T I S S U E

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MS. TREE

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L-5238

Remember last issue, when I said that henceforth SWAK! would be written by the erstwhile Mr. Collins—true to established *Ms. Tree* tradition? If so, you well might ask what the poo I'm doing here.

Outside of grabbing another typical yet flimsy attempt to assert my ego, the reason I'm the writer of this issue's SWAK! is quite simple: *Dick Tracy*. You might have heard about it. You might have read the newspaper strip (written by ol' erstwhile himself). You might have read the paperback novelization of the movie (similarly written by ol' erstwhile himself). You might even have seen the movie—only about a zillion people are expected to have done so.

The problem is, in this, the two-week period prior to the movie's opening, Mr. Collins has been besieged by trillions of newspaper reporters and television interviewers; indeed, the sum total of Max's *Dick Tracy* airtime actually is longer than the run of any post-M*A*S*H McLean Stevenson television show (a little known fact). It's been all Max could do to do all those interviews and stay relatively current on his MS. TREE and *Dick Tracy* headlines—let alone the deadline for his newest novel.

So, since the amount of time between the release of MS. TREE QUARTERLY #1 and the letter column deadline was a mere two weeks, we opted to keep Max at the word processor writing the script for our next issue ... and I stepped in to lend a hand.

Max will be in this space next issue, if the creek don't rise.

Ms. Tree and Co.,

I would like to congratulate you on MS. TREE Quarterly #1. I have to admit this isn't the kind of book I would normally get into; I'm mostly into the "super-hero" books (in fact, the main reason I bought this book was for the Batman story). I am happy to say, however, that I'll definitely keep on buying this book.

The MS. TREE Storm was really great. She has a lot of guts and the brains to go with it. I'll look forward to the next complete story.

The Midnight story was very good as well. I've never read *The Spirit*, whom Midnight is supposed to look like, but I'm sure they are not carbon copies of each other. It will be interesting to see in what direction this series goes.

As for the illustrated story, well, I have already confessed that Batman was the main reason I bought this book; however, I didn't know what to expect. I was very pleasantly surprised.

The Storm was great and the art was brilliant. Mike Grell already had my respect for his great writing and occasional art on GREEN ARROW. In this story, he kept the art rather simple, but each illustration told a story. FASCINATING. This illustrated story is a great idea; I can't wait to read more.

I would love to see Green Arrow in these pages, but something tells me he'll be showing up in QUESTION QUARTERLY. The Huntress, Butcher, and Hellblazer would be great, too. Also, Mike Grell was a great start, so how about Frank Miller, John Byrne, Bill Sienkiewicz, and Brian Bolland.

I hope MS. TREE QUARTERLY becomes one of your best sellers.

Arnold Jordan
12955 S.W. 53rd Street
Miami, FL 33175

Green Arrow's a probability. Butcher's here right now. And Hellblazer's a great idea; let's see what we can do.

Dear Max and Terry:

I must admit I'm more than a little surprised to find myself writing to "SWAK" over three years after I purchased what I thought would be my last issue of MS. TREE. A good surprise, though, as MS. TREE was one of my favorite comics of the mid-eighties.

Maybe I should've expected it, actually; after all, Ms. Tree has shown up in books published by more publishers than any other character I know of. And, thanks to Max and Terry, she has always managed to remain true to form.

That having been said, though, I must admit I was a little disappointed with the story in MS. TREE QUARTERLY #1. Maybe I just had expectations that were too high, but the story seemed ... routine. There were a number of good points: Michael punching Dominique (and later Donnie), Mike Jr. actually aging in real time, and Dominique (surprisingly) being put out of the picture. But there were also a number of bad

points: her cold-blooded murders on pages 8 and 46 seemed too cold, even for Ms. Tree, and solving another Muerta murder just seemed redundant.

I didn't care much for the Midnight story, either (I haven't gotten around to reading the Batman one yet), and it would have been nice if Ms. Tree were on the cover.

Still, I do intend to stick around (despite the pricey cover price—I can afford it, but that's not the point) as I have a lot of faith in Max.

One last thing: with the success of *Batman* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and the probable success of *Dick Tracy*, and Warner Communications now publishing this book, a Ms. Tree movie doesn't seem far-fetched at all.

Fred Averick
32-11 75th Street
Jackson Heights, NY 11370

How true. But ... who was it on the cover of our first issue, if not Ms. Tree?

Dear Mike, Max, and Terry;

The long-awaited return of Ms. Tree was a pleasure. For starters, seeing the strip in color again was wonderful. Beyond that, Terry's art has never looked better; the difference his own inking makes is phenomenal.

Then there are Max's storytelling skills, allowed here to stretch and relax a bit in 48 pages, so new readers can be easily introduced to the characters while old faithfuls are rewarded by some nice characterization scenes. And, of course, a suitably violent and mesmerizing story. It's nice to see that Tree still has her personality quirks intact.

I was struck, reading this book, what a fine cast of characters Max has created over the years—certainly enough to guarantee a lot of new stories with ample room for character development and plot twists aplenty.

I'd be along for the ride with the second half of the book; hell, 48 pages of Ms. Tree alone is a dream come true. The addition of Midnight and revolving text piece is icing on the cake. I'm not certain yet whether the icing is as good as the cake, but I'm not averse to trying some more before I make up my mind.

Though I am a fan of both Ed Gorman's own writing and his wonderful *Mystery Scene*, I was underwhelmed by the initial install-

ment of Midnight. The gimmick that he doesn't speak when in his identity seemed meaningless to me. The story was also one-dimensional—no real mystery involved, and very much the Punisher sort of judge, jury, and executioner thing.

In truth, I expected more from Ed. Perhaps it's too soon to judge, but I'd certainly like to see a more rounded personality emerge in future installments. The art, on the other hand, was more than moodily adequate for the story.

As for the text piece, I'm uncomfortable with it. I have a hard time with text stories in comics—the two seem like oil and water to me. It's simply not what I buy comics for. And while I had no trouble reading Denny's Batman story, I'd also say I would rather have seen a comics story in its place. I appreciate the experiment here and the reasoning behind it, but again, when I buy comics, comics are what I want. I'll reserve judgment till after reading the upcoming selection of text pieces, many of which sound intriguing. So far, I'm not impressed.

Overall, however, this is a stunning package and well worth the loose change. It's amazing MS. TREE has already lived through fifty issues—let's hope her life at DC is at least as long.

Jeff Gelb
c/o Radio and Records
1930 Century Park West
Los Angeles, CA 90067

The text stories are indeed an experiment, Jeff. If our readers tell us they'd prefer another comics story, or perhaps a 64-page comic instead of the current 80-pager, fine—no hard feelings. As for me, these types of experiments are great fun.

Dear Mike:

OUTSTANDING! Boy, was I ever impressed with the first issue of MS. TREE QUARTERLY.

I had heard of the MS. TREE comics but so much of my entertainment budget went toward DC titles that I rarely had any left over for independent purchases. I just may have to start going through the back issue files at the local comics store and find some.

I have rarely been this impressed after only one issue of any comic. You very definitely have a winner here. Now about my only beef—about this quarterly thing...

You have an outstanding title here and I would gladly add it to my regular "must purchase" list if you could make it a monthly...? Pretty please...?

It just crossed my mind that MS. TREE would make an excellent crossover miniseries with none other than DC's own El Diablo! Wouldn't that be great? Boy, could they ever butt heads over the best way to handle a case. But, think about it—they are both set in the "real world" and both have such diametrically opposed philoso-

phies and approaches to essentially the same job! Oh, I know the rule about licensed characters NEVER doing crossovers with DC characters, but it would make an interesting several issues.

Do keep up the great work—you've really got it cut out for you and the rest of the crew to top the first issue!

Jon S. Aiken
1043 Avondale Avenue S.E.
Atlanta, GA 30312

Look, Jon, call me a wimp if you will, but I don't want to be the one to tell Max 'n' Terry they've got to produce 48 pages of MS. TREE each and every month. Or even 24 pages each and every month. They simply don't have that much time in their schedules.

Dear Sirs,

After reading about the return of Ms. Tree I wanted to write to tell you I am excited about the soon-to-come MS. TREE QUARTERLY! I've been a fan of the hard-edged detective since the 21st issue of her first series. (I bought all the back issues after that as well as the three "Files of" books). To have Ms. Tree in a book on a regular basis is the best news I could get.

The format sounds like the best one yet and with some text fiction will be a solid package. Even if you are adding the mentioned Batman story, it will be fantastic.

I am worried about a few things, though. Is the comic going to be restricted to the Comics Code? When you were "independent," at times you could literally get away with murder (I still think that's what Ms. Tree did to the child molester who kidnapped her son in the second "Runaway" story). I know the Code would never allow it.

What kind of restraints will DC have over the book? Some of the best stuff I know that was done in the first series would never pass in a lot of DC regular series. The story with King Lear and the abortion stories were all out in this "danger" area.

The WILD DOG special was great. I loved it when the mobster tells Wild Dog not to shoot him and he replies with a simple "Are you kidding?" I like the idea of a Ms. Tree and Wild Dog team-up. She would be annoyed by his vigilante ways and I think it would make her reflect on her own way of handling situations.

I've already told my comics shop owner to hold a copy of MS. TREE QUARTERLY for me and am hoping to see a shipping date soon.

Richard M. Noland
5583 Hollins Lane
Burke, VA 22015

As you can see, Richard, we are indeed Codeless, although I think it would be rather fun to see the Code censors go through an issue... grasping their little hearts... gasping for air... turning blue...

Dear Max,

On behalf of all DC fans, I welcome you and Ms. Tree to our world. I've read about Mike and her hard-bitten adventures for three years. I followed other creations you brought us, especially Wild Dog. I even read your book about TV detectives.

The return of MS. TREE ranked as one of the high points on the DC schedule, and in a quarterly with limited ads, color, and 48 uninterrupted pages of action yet. But was it worth the wait, or the hype, or the price?

YES! Granted, the story had too many flashbacks to acquaint me and other new readers with the characters, but they can't be avoided. Everything else was perfect, a blend of the action I love in Dashiell Hammett's works and a modern, mature sensibility about the characters.

Who'd believe that a private investigator could be a loving mother and a psycho killer? But it works. You've created a set of characters who don't fit into simple holes in a world where all the human elements collide in a maelstrom of violence. Bravo.

I wish this was a shorter monthly. I mean, having to wait three months to meet up with Mike again, just when I've met her? Or her enemies?

I particularly like (as a character, not a person) Don Donnie. Too often the Mob is portrayed as a bunch of thugs. Unfortunately, they've never been that simple, and today's breed makes Capone look absolutely primitive. Don Donnie represents a step forward from the old Mob to the modern scourge running legit businesses illegitimately. Let's hope that Mike finds a few intriguing new ways to bring the son down to the father's current level.

Too often, female writers complain that men cannot write women. While that might be true of others, you show no signs of being incapable of anything. She feels as real and as believable as any woman, even within her milieu. She ranks with such characters as Chris Cagney or Nora Charles in the world of crime and women. If only Jessica Fletcher would just be tougher.

All in all, a great first issue. But I'm expecting more. After all, this isn't the only quarterly aimed at an adult audience. I bought this as a change after THE QUESTION, and while I'm giving you a chance, one wrong move and my limited budget changes to include Denny's faceless crime-fighter. But then, I know you won't let me down. Besides, Wild Dog is coming in a year or so. See you in three.

Simon DelMonte
Queens, New York

NEXT ISSUE: Ms. Tree and young Mike face some serious personal problems, as our hero and her stepson each must confront the issue of gay bashing in our society. Plus, Midnight and another illustrated prose feature... and a fantastic painted cover from Scott Hampton!

—Mike Gold